

THE
ENTIRE WORKS
OF THE
REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.
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OR

DISCOURSES

DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY,

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

BY THE

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J A M E S.

MMCCCLII.

THE DUTY OF PATIENCE.

Jam. i. 2—4. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

WE at this time are scarcely able to form a conception of the state of the Church in the apostolic age. Christianity amongst us is attended with none of the evils to which the primitive professors of it were exposed. But to what is this owing? Is Christianity altered at all? or is it less offensive than it was in the eyes of ungodly men? No: it is the same as ever: and, if those who profess it be not despised and hated now as they were in former times, it is because they retain “the form only of godliness, and have none of its power.” Let persons enter into the spirit of Christianity now, as the Christians did in the Apostles’ days, and they will be treated precisely as they were, so far at least as the laws of the land will admit of it: and, if they be not persecuted unto death, it will not be from there being any more love to piety in the carnal heart now, than there was then; but from the greater protection which is afforded by the laws of the land, and from a spirit of toleration which modern usages have established. Real vital godliness was then universally hated; and it is so still. It was not to the Jewish converts in

Palestine only that St. James wrote, but “to the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad.” Religion was persecuted not by one party only, but by every party and in every place: and it is still, in every place, “to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:” and all who will cultivate it will sooner or later need to have the consolations of our text administered to them for their support.

In the words which we have read, we see,

I. The appointed portion of God’s people—

In former ages they were hated for righteousness’ sake—

[Go back to the time of Abel. You well know that he was murdered by his own brother Cain. And what was the ground of Cain’s enmity against him? We are informed on infallible authority: “Cain slew his brother, because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous^a.” Descend through all successive ages, and you will still find the same enmity subsisting between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent. As light and darkness, so Christ and Belial, both in themselves and in their members, ever have been, and ever must be, opposed to each other^b. As to the *diversity* of trials to which the godly have been exposed, we need look no further than to the short summary given us in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “Some were tortured: others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented:” (yes, they were so treated “of whom the world was not worthy:”) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth^c.” Come we to the time of Christ and his Apostles: it might be hoped that their superior light and piety, and the innumerable miracles with which their divine commission was confirmed, would screen them from such evil treatment; and especially that the Lord Jesus Christ, whose character was so spotless, and whose wisdom was infinite, should be able to overcome the prejudices of a blind infatuated world. But they were only the more exposed to the taunts and cruelty of the ungodly in proportion as their light shined with the brighter splendour. And all who in the first ages of the Church became their followers,

^a 1 John iii. 12. ^b 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15. ^c Heb. xi. 35—38.

were, in their measure, subjected to the same trials, and made to drink of the same bitter cup.]

The same treatment they meet with in the present day—

[We have observed, that a mere form of piety will pass without opposition: but real, vital godliness, will subject us to reproach at this day, as much as ever: “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution^d.” That kind of godliness which *arises from self* and *terminates in self*, will bring us into favour with the world: but that which is derived altogether from Christ as its proper source and author, and is exercised altogether for the advancement of his glory, is, and ever will be, odious in the eyes of the ungodly: and a man who exemplifies it in his life and conversation can no more escape persecution than Christ himself could. To receive all from Christ, and to do all for Christ, is the very essence of Christian piety: and in requiring this of his followers, our blessed Lord has bequeathed to his Church a never-failing source of variance with the world. This he himself tells us: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: and a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” Accordingly we find universally, that where a person begins to live by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to devote himself to his service, all his friends and relatives will take the alarm, and try, by every method of ridicule, or menace, or persuasion, to divert him from his purpose. Let him live in an entire neglect of his soul, and no one will trouble himself about him. He may live his whole life in such a state, and not a friend will exhort him to serve the Lord: but the least approach to piety will be discouraged by every friend and relative that he has. Not that religion will be discountenanced *as religion*: some evil name must be given to it first; and then it will be reprobated *under that character*. But the very persons who hold in the highest veneration the names of the Apostles, and of the great reformers of our Church, and who would raise shrines and monuments to departed saints, will persecute the living saints with the utmost rancour: and were the Apostles or reformers to live again upon the earth, they would receive the very same treatment from them that they met with from the people of the age in which they lived. If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, it is in vain for any servant of his to hope that he shall escape a similar reproach^e.]

^d 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^e Matt. x. 24, 25

Painful as this portion is to flesh and blood, none need to fear it, if only they attend to

II. The Apostle's directions in relation to it—

God graciously appoints to his people this portion, in order to promote their spiritual welfare, and progressively to transform them into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness. Hence St. James exhorts his afflicted brethren *to regard their trials as means to an end*; and,

1. To welcome the means—

[The proper tendency of trials is to work patience in our souls. At first indeed they operate to the production of impatience, or, rather I should say, to the eliciting of those evil dispositions which lurk in our hearts. Till we have had our pride in some measure subdued, we know not how to bear the unkindness which we meet with: we fret under it, and rage even as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: but when we discover our weakness, we are ashamed of it, and humble ourselves before God on account of it, and implore grace from him to support us, and thus gradually become instructed by the discipline, and are at last “strengthened with all might by his Spirit unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father,” who has wrought in us that very change of heart and life which has exposed us to the enmity of the ungodly world^f.

Now when we see what good our God designs us by these trials, we should not only be reconciled to them, but be thankful for them, and “count them just occasions for exalted joy.” For, what price can be too great for so valuable an acquisition as that of a meek, submissive, and patient spirit? We submit with readiness to many things which are displeasing to flesh and blood for the advancement of our bodily health: and shall we not thankfully take the prescriptions of our heavenly Physician for the health of our souls? What, if they be unpalatable to our taste? We should regard the affliction as good, when we know what benefits will ultimately result from it^g; assured, that “the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us^h.” When therefore we see the clouds gathering around us, we should not be alarmed, but should say rather, like the countryman whose fields are burnt up with drought, Now God is about to refresh and fructify my barren heart, and his clouds shall drop fatness on my soul. What if your enemies

^f Col. i. 11, 12.

^g Isai. xxvii. 9.

^h Rom. viii. 18.

meditate nothing but evil? Should that be of any concern to you, when you know who has engaged to overrule it all for goodⁱ? I say then with the prophet, "Fear not" any menaces or preparations, how formidable soever they may appear^k; nor complain of any trials, however oppressive they may be at the time; but rejoice in them^l, and bless God who counts you "worthy to bear" them^m, and accept them as an invaluable "gift at his handsⁿ," and "take pleasure in them^o," as knowing that they will assuredly issue in your welfare, and "in the honour of your God^p."]

2. To cultivate the end—

[Does God design by means of trials to make you resemble him "who was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth?" Seek to experience this benefit from them; and "let patience have its perfect work in you, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Complain not that your trials are heavy, or of long continuance: but be more anxious to have your dross consumed, than to have the intensity of the furnace diminished. It was "through sufferings that the Lord Jesus Christ himself was made perfect^q:" and if "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered^r," will not ye be content to learn it in the same way? We are ready to think that perfection consists in *active* virtue: but God is not a whit less honoured by *passive* virtue: and when patience has so far operated upon your soul as to make you "glory in tribulations" for the Lord's sake^s, and you can say from your inmost soul, under all circumstances, "Not my will, but thine be done," you will have attained that measure of holiness which constitutes perfection; and you will ere long, as a shock of corn that is fully ripe, be treasured up in the garner of your heavenly Father. You have seen "Jesus, after having endured the cross, and despised the shame, set down at the right hand of the throne of God^t:" be content then to "suffer with him, that in due time you may be glorified together^u." Let this be the one object of your concern: and pray that "the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus through the blood of the everlasting covenant, *would make you perfect* in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight through Christ Jesus^x."]

ⁱ Rom. viii. 28.

^k Isai. viii. 12, 13.

^l Luke vi. 22, 23.

^m Acts v. 41.

ⁿ Phil. i. 29.

^o 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^p 1 Pet. iv. 14, 16.

^q Heb. ii. 10.

^r Heb. v. 8.

^s Rom. v. 3.

^t Heb. xii. 2.

^u Rom. viii. 17. 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

^x Heb. xiii. 20.

ADDRESS—

1. The timid Christian—

["Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" O! "fear not the oppressor, as if he were able to destroy: for where is the fury of the oppressor^y?" Look at Pharaoh and all his host: what could they do against the God of Israel^z? Look at Herod, when he would "stretch out his hand to vex the Church:" "he falls a prey even to worms," which eat him up alive^a. Know that the creature is no more than "an axe or saw in your Father's hands:" and that he can do nothing, but as your Father sees fit to employ him for your good^b. In all that he attempts, he is limited and controlled^c, and shall effect nothing which shall not subserve your eternal interests^d. Be strong then, and of good courage: and whatever cross may lie in your way, take it up cheerfully, and bear it after your Lord and Saviour: for be well assured, that your Saviour deserves it richly at your hands — — —]

2. The suffering Christian—

[Shall I pity you? No; rather let me congratulate you as being made conformable to your Lord and Saviour^e. Repeated are St. James's declarations, that sufferings for Christ's sake are subjects rather for joy than for grief. "We count them happy that endure^f." And again, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for, when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him^g." Receive then trials as "the portion which God has appointed you^h;" and expect that, if your afflictions abound for Christ's sake, "so shall your consolations also abound by Christⁱ;" and whatever you may lose for his sake, you shall even in this present life receive an hundred-fold more than you have lost^k, and, in the world to come, "an accumulated weight of happiness and glory" to all eternity^l. And when you shall have arrived at the realms of glory, it will be no grief to you that you "came out of great tribulation;" for then will "your Saviour lead you to the living fountains of bliss, and God himself will wipe away all tears from your eyes^m."]

^y Isai. li. 12, 13.^b Isai. x. 7, 11, 15.^e 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.^h 1 Thess. iii. 3.^l 2 Cor. iv. 17.^z Rom. ix. 17.^c Rev. ii. 10.^f Jam. v. 11.ⁱ 2 Cor. i. 5.^m Rev. vii. 14—17.^a Acts xii. 1—3, 23.^d 1 Pet. i. 7.^g Jam. i. 12.^k Mark x. 28—30.

MMCCCLIII.

THE WAY TO OBTAIN TRUE WISDOM.

Jam. i. 5, 6. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*

WISDOM is necessary for the due discharge of every office of life: but it is more particularly necessary for a Christian, on account of the many difficulties to which he is subjected by his Christian profession. For no sooner does he give himself up to the service of his God, than his friends and relatives exert themselves to draw him back again to the world. Every species of temptation they lay in his way, if by any means they may effect their purpose, and divert him from the path which he has chosen. They fail not to represent to him, the injury that will arise to his reputation and worldly interests, and the pain which his new course occasions to those whose happiness he is bound to consult. Not unfrequently too parental authority is interposed to arrest his progress, and to interdict the use of such means as he has found conducive to his spiritual welfare. Those books which would best inform his mind, that society which would most strengthen his heart, and those ordinances which would most edify his soul, are all prohibited; and no alternative is left him, but to relinquish his pursuit of heavenly things, or incur the contempt and hatred of his dearest friends. What now must be done? He wishes to keep a conscience void of offence: but how can it be effected? If he is faithful to his God, he offends man: and, if he pleases man, he violates his duty to God. The principle which he adopts is in itself plain and simple; namely, that he must obey God, and not man. But how to apply this principle is a difficulty which frequently involves him in the greatest embarrassment. If he relax in nothing, he appears absurd in the extreme: if his compliances be carried too far, he

endangers his peace of mind, and the welfare of his soul. Again, in the manner of executing what his conscience dictates, he is also at a loss. He may be too bold, or too timid; too faithful, or too obsequious. The different dispositions of all with whom he has to do must be consulted, and his conduct be adapted to them in all the diversified situations in which he is called to act. But "who is sufficient for these things?" Often does he wish for an experienced counsellor to advise him; and almost sit down in despair of ever attaining such a measure of wisdom as is necessary for him. It is to persons so circumstanced that St. James addresses the directions in our text. He supposes them to have "fallen into divers temptations," and to be labouring so to "possess their souls in patience," that "patience may have its perfect work, and that they may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." But how is all this to be effected? Any mariner may steer a vessel in a calm: but how shall one so inexperienced regulate it in a storm; and so regulate it, that it shall in no respect be driven out of its course? To these anxious questions the Apostle gives an answer: wherein he directs us,

I. How to seek wisdom—

True wisdom is the gift of God—

[Even earthly wisdom must in reality be traced to God as its author. The persons who formed the tabernacle and all its vessels derived all their skill from God^a: and even those who move in a sphere which may be supposed to be suited to the meanest capacity, and spend their lives in the common pursuits of agriculture, can no farther approve themselves skilful in their work, than they are instructed by God himself^b. But spiritual wisdom is still farther out of the reach of unassisted reason, because it is conversant about things "which no human eye has seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived, and which can only be revealed by the Spirit of God^c." It is emphatically "a wisdom which is from above^d," and which can "come only from the Father of lights, with whom is no

^a Exod. xxxvi. 1, 2.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 9—12.

^b Isai. xxviii. 23—29.

^d Jam. iii. 17.

variableness, neither shadow of turning^e." The Spirit of God, whose office it is to impart it unto men, is called "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord^f:" and to him are we directed "to open the eyes of our understanding^g," and to "guide us into all truth^h:" since it is only by the unction derived from him, that we can possibly attain a spiritual discernmentⁱ.]

To him must we look for it in earnest prayer—

[Study, doubtless, even a study of the Holy Scriptures, is necessary; because it is only by the written word that we are to regulate our course. But to study we must add humble and fervent supplication; according to that direction of Solomon, "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God: for the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding^k." Accordingly we find the Apostle Paul crying to God in behalf of the Ephesian Church, that "God the Father would give unto them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ^l;" and, for the Colossians he prayed, that they also might by the same Spirit "be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding^m."

And to seek it in this way we are all encouraged, both *from a general view of God's goodness, and from a particular and express promise.*

"God giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not:" "he opens his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness;" he "gives alike to the evil and the good, to the just and to the unjust." If then he give so abundantly to those who seek him *not*, "will he refuse his Holy Spirit unto them that *ask him*?" True, they are unworthy of so rich a blessing: and, as Jephthah upbraided those who requested his assistance against the Ammonites, saying to them, "Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me, now ye are in distress?" so might God reply to them; "Ye have resisted my Spirit, and rebelled against the light, times without number; and how can you expect that I should aid you any more?" But he will not so treat the weeping suppliant; but will surely impart unto him the blessing he

^e ver. 17. with Matt. xvi. 17.

^g Eph. i. 18.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 20, 27. and v. 20. with 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^k Prov. ii. 2—6.

^l Eph. i. 16, 17.

^f Isai. xi. 2.

^h John xvi. 13.

^m Col. i. 9.

desires. Of this he assures us by *an express promise*: "Let him ask of God; and *it shall be given him.*" This promise may be relied on, as may many others which he has given us to the same effectⁿ — — — *The time, and the manner, and the measure* in which it shall be fulfilled, must be left to God: but fulfilled it shall be to all who rest upon it. Not that a man shall be rendered infallible, or have such wisdom imparted to him as shall keep him from *every degree* of error; but so much as his necessities require, God will assuredly vouchsafe to all who seek it of him in sincerity and truth.]

That no man shall seek wisdom in vain, St. James adds a caution, from which we learn,

II. How to secure the attainment of it—

"We must ask in faith, nothing wavering." Here it will be proper for me to shew,

1. What is that faith which we are called to exercise—

[It has not respect to that individual thing which we may chance to ask; for we may possibly be asking for something which God sees would be injurious to us, or, if not injurious, yet inconsistent with the ends which he has determined to accomplish. When our blessed Lord prayed for the removal of the bitter cup, and Paul for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, neither the one prayer nor the other was granted *literally*; though both were answered in the way most satisfactory to the suplicants, and most conducive to God's honour. So the *specific* thing which *we* ask, may be withheld: but we shall be sure of receiving something better in its stead: and it is with this latitude only that our faith must be exercised, except where there is an express promise for us to plead: and *then* we may assuredly expect that very thing to be granted to us.

Now respecting such a measure of wisdom as shall ultimately guide us through all our difficulties, we may ask with the fullest possible assurance: and in asking it, we should have no more doubt of its being given to us, than of our own existence: we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering." If we doubt at all, our doubt must arise, either from not being fully persuaded of the power of God to help us, or from some suspicion of his willingness. But to limit his power is sinful in the extreme: and to doubt his willingness is, as St. John expresses it, "to make God a liar:" for the promise in the text is to every creature under heaven who asks in faith. I

ⁿ John xiv. 13, 14. and xv. 7. and xvi. 23, 24.

well know that persons pretend to found their doubts on their own unworthiness: but this is a mere fallacy: for every man is unworthy: and, if unworthiness be such a disqualification as deprives a man of all right to expect the blessing in answer to his prayers, then no man living has any right to expect the blessing; and the promise of God is a mere nullity. Our need of wisdom is supposed in the very petition that is offered for it: and the more deeply we feel our need of it, the more willingly and more largely will God confer it upon us. In praying for it therefore, we are to ask, not on the ground of any fancied worthiness in us, but on the sole ground of its having been freely promised to us: and, in that view, we must lift up our hands, “as without wrath, so also without doubting^o.”]

2. Its certain efficiency to the desired end—

[In some circumstances, the fulfilment of the promise seems to exceed all reasonable hope, if not the limits of possibility itself. But in proportion as it seems to exceed hope, we are to “believe in hope,” just as Abraham did, when the promise was given to him of a posterity as numerous as the stars of heaven^p. Our blessed Lord has taught us this in a very striking manner. To his disciples, who expressed their surprise that the fig-tree, which he had cursed, should wither away in one single night, he said, “Have faith in God: for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto, “*What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them^q*.” The truth is, that God, if I may so say, feels his own honour implicated in fulfilling his own word: and therefore, if not for our sakes, yet for his own name’s sake, “he will accomplish the thing which hath gone out of his mouth.” Yet not for his own sake only will he do it, but for our sakes also: for, “them that honour him he will honour.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are unconscious of their need of wisdom—

[Though men are sensible enough of their ignorance in relation to human sciences, they almost universally fancy themselves competent to decide every thing relating to their faith or practice. But very pointed is that declaration of Solomon, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool^r.” Respecting

^o 1 Tim. ii. 8.

^p Rom. iv. 18—20.

^q Mark xi. 22—24.

^r Prov. xxviii. 26.

spiritual things we are all by nature blind, and need, the learned as well as the unlearned, to have our understandings opened to understand them^s. We all “lack wisdom” exceedingly: and to all equally would I address those words of Solomon, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct thy paths^t” — — —]

2. Those who are discouraged by their want of wisdom—

[If you look either to the greatness of your difficulties, or your own insufficiency to meet them, you may well faint and fail: but if you look to God, there is no ground for discouragement at all. For, can he not “ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings^u?” And “does he not put his treasure into earthen vessels on purpose that the excellency of the power may be seen to be of Him^x?” See how he reproveth Jeremiah for his desponding thoughts^y: and be content to be “weak, that his strength may be perfected in your weakness^z” — — — See how he reproveth Peter also^a; and be careful how you admit a doubt. If you are doubting, he warns you plainly, that “you must not expect to receive any thing of the Lord^b:” but, if you will believe, according to your faith it shall be unto you^c — — —]

^s Rev. iii. 17, 18. Luke xxiv. 45.

^t Prov. iii. 5, 6.

^u Ps. viii. 2.

^x 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^y Jer. i. 6, 7.

^z 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^a Matt. xiv. 30, 31.

^b ver. 7.

^c Matt. ix. 29.

MMCCCLIV.

THE DOUBLE-MINDED MAN EXPOSED.

Jam. i. 8. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

IT is a generally-acknowledged truth, that the mind constitutes the man. In human friendships, an insincere profession of regard will not stand a severe trial; but will fail us, when we most need a firm support. In religion too, if the heart be not right with God, we shall never persevere amidst the difficulties and dangers with which we shall be encompassed. That our faith will be tried, is certain; and that we shall need support from above, is certain: I may add too, that, if we be “strong in faith, giving glory to

God," we shall derive such aid from above, as shall carry us through all our temptations, how great soever they may be, and make us "more than conquerors" over all our enemies. But, if we are of a doubtful mind, we shall never finally maintain our steadfastness; but shall draw back when dangers threaten us, and faint when trials come upon us; for "the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Let us endeavour,

I. To ascertain the character here specified—

The Apostle is speaking solely respecting confidence in God: to that therefore we shall confine our observations. Were we to enter at large into the character of a "double-minded man," we should have a vast field before us, sufficient to occupy our attention through many discourses: but by adhering simply to the view proposed to us in the text, we shall best consult the scope of the Apostle's argument, and the edification of your minds.

"The double-minded man" then is one,

1. Whose reliance on God is not simple—

[There is in every man a proneness to self-dependence: and, in matters of ordinary occurrence, no man, except the truly pious, will look higher than to himself for wisdom to guide him, or for strength to succour him. Even when obstacles arise which call for the intervention of a superior power, he will cry unto his God for help: but he will not "pray in faith," because he still "leans to his own understanding," and is unable to "commit his way entirely to the Lord." As there were in the days of old those who "swore by Jehovah and by Malcham too^a," and those who "feared the Lord and yet served other gods" at the same time^b, so the double-minded man will rely on the Lord, but will rely on himself also; and make God and himself successively or conjointly the objects of his hope, as the variations of his mind, or the urgency of his necessities, may seem to require.

We must however distinguish between a prudent use of means, and a divided ground of hope: for confidence in God is on no account to supersede the use of prudent means. Jacob

^a Zeph. i. 5.

^b 2 Kings xvii. 33, 41.

acted wisely in his endeavours to pacify his brother's wrath, sending presents by many successive messengers, and dividing his family, so that, if some were slain by Esau, others might escape. These precautions sprang not from any want of faith in God, but from a determination to leave nothing undone on his part which might contribute to the desired end. His confidence was not at all in the means he used, but in God, who, he hoped, would accomplish by them the purposes of his grace^c. But where means are so used as to become a joint ground of confidence to those who use them, there is the evil complained of in the text. Such was the character of the Jews who went down to Egypt for help against their enemies. God had told them, that "in returning and rest they should be saved; that in quietness and confidence should be their strength; and that their strength was to sit still." But not able to rely on God alone, they went down to Egypt for help, and thereby provoked God to give them up to utter destruction^d. God is a jealous God, and requires that we should trust in him *alone*, and have no confidence whatever on an arm of flesh^e.]

2. Whose confidence in God is not entire—

[Not only is there to be no reliance on the creature, but there should be no distrust of God. We should rely upon him without any doubt as to the issue of our confidence. We should view every thing, even to the falling of a sparrow, as under his controul. We should feel that there is no power or counsel against him: and that for man to defeat his purposes, is utterly impossible. We should see, that, if we trust in God, he will accomplish for us every thing that is good; and the things which are not, shall as certainly exist, as if they were already in existence^f.

But this measure of faith is not in the double-minded man. He cannot so repose his confidence in God. He does not so realize the thought of God's universal agency, as to be able to commit every thing into his hands, and to "stand still in an assured expectation of seeing the salvation of God^g." On the contrary, he is ever "limiting the Holy One of Israel:" and when successive trials arise, he overlooks his former deliverances, and reiterates his wonted apprehensions; like those who said, "He smote the stony rock indeed, that the waters gushed out; but can he give bread also, or provide flesh for his people^h?"]

The character of the double-minded man will be more fully seen, whilst we proceed,

^c Gen. xxxii. 13—23. and xxxiii. 1—3.

^d Isai. xxx. 7, 15, 16. ^e Jer. xvii. 5—8.

^f Rom. iv. 17.

^g Exod. xiv. 13, 14. ^h Ps. lxxviii. 20.

II. To mark his conduct—

“He is unstable in all his ways,” and is ever liable to be turned from the truth—

1. In his principles—

[Not having such clear views of the covenant of grace as to be able to lay hold of it, and confidently to expect all the blessings contained in it, he is ever open to the allurements of novelty, and ready, “like a child, to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness with which they lie in wait to deceiveⁱ.” Matters which really are of doubtful disputation, possess in his mind an importance which does not belong to them: and he will dwell on them, to the neglect of other things which are essential to his salvation. Hence it is that heretics of every description gain such influence: and hence it is that so many, “led away by the error of the wicked, fall from their own steadfastness^k.” The versatility both of the one and of the other originates in this, that they have never obtained such a knowledge of God in Christ Jesus as has brought perfect peace into their souls. They know not what God is to his people: they see not to what an extent he has pledged himself to them: they have no conception of the interest which the Lord Jesus Christ takes in them, or how indissolubly connected their happiness is with his honour and glory. Let them be well “rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith, as they have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving^l,” and they will “stand fast in the faith,” and suffer nothing to “move them away from the hope of the Gospel.”]

2. In his practice—

[The man that cannot fully confide in God will be alarmed, whenever a storm is gathering around him. Were “his mind fully stayed on God, he would be kept in perfect peace^m”; and, when menaced with the most formidable assaults, would reply, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joyⁿ.” But the double-minded man is so terrified by his adversaries, that he dares not to proceed in the plain path of duty. Like “the stony-ground hearers, he is presently offended, and in time of temptation will fall away.” How many of this description are there in every place, where the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth! It convinces many; it calls forth many to make an open profession of their acceptance of it: but in a little

ⁱ Eph. iv. 14.

^k 2 Pet. iii. 17.

^l Col. ii. 6, 7.

^m Isai. xxvi. 3.

ⁿ Acts xx. 24.

time how many fair blossoms wither! how many are blown off from the tree by storms and tempests! and how many, through their unbelief, are found rotten at the core! Verily, it is rather the gleanings, than the harvest, that is brought home to reward the toil that has been bestowed upon them; so many "turn back unto perdition, and so few believe to the saving of the soul."

But it may here be asked, Are we in no case to bend to circumstances? Did not St. Paul himself diversify his modes of conduct, sometimes complying with Jewish rites, which at other times he declared to have been utterly abolished? Yea, was he not of so accommodating a disposition, that he became all things to all men, and acted as a Jew or as a Gentile, according to the society with which he mixed? Yes; he did so: but there is this great difference between his conduct and that of a double-minded man: what Paul did, he did for the benefit of others: but the compliances of the double-minded man are only for the purpose of preventing evil to himself. His compliances too were only in things of perfect indifference: he would not have been guilty of denying or dishonouring the Saviour on any account: but the double-minded man cares not what dishonour he brings on the Gospel, provided he may but escape the evils with which he is menaced for his adherence to it. He is "like the wave," now raised, now depressed, and driven hither and thither as the wind impels it; whilst the upright soul is as the rock, which, amidst all the storms and tempests that assail it, is unshaken and unmoved.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The vast importance of self-examination—

[Men do not easily see their own duplicity. "The heart is deceitful above all things," and readily persuades us, that our doubtful confidence in God, and our partial obedience to him, are all that is required of us. But God discerns the inmost recesses of the heart, and sees there all the latent workings of worldliness and unbelief: nor will he at the last day approve of any but those whom he can attest to have been "Israelites indeed, and without guile." As for "the fearful and unbelieving," he will assign to them no other portion than "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone^o." O let us fear, lest, after all our profession, "our religion prove vain," and we be found to have "deceived our own souls^p."]]

2. The indispensable necessity of being "renewed in the spirit of our minds"—

[Never, till that takes place, shall we possess "the single eye^q," and walk before God in one undeviating path of holy

^o Rev. xxi. 8.

^p Jam. i. 26.

^q Matt. vi. 23, 24.

obedience. We may take up a profession of religion; but instability will mark our every step. To rely on God uniformly, and to "follow him fully," are far too high attainments for the natural man. Let me then entreat you to seek of God a new heart, and to pray that he would "renew a right spirit within you." Then may you hope to be "steadfast, and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord:" and then shall you be fixed "as pillars in the temple of your God, that shall go no more out for ever".]

† Rev. iii. 12.

MMCCCLV.

THE EFFECTS OF RELIGION ON THE DIFFERENT ORDERS OF SOCIETY.

Jam. i. 9, 10. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

RELIGION certainly appears in some respects adverse to the happiness of men, inasmuch as it inculcates the daily practice of humiliation and contrition, mortification and self-denial. The injunction to cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye, cannot, it might be thought, conduce to our comfort in this world, whatever it might do with respect to the world to come. But, if Christianity deprive us of some carnal joys (I should rather say, limit and refine them), it affords abundant ground for joy of a more exalted kind. It does not merely concede as a privilege, but prescribes as a duty, that we should "rejoice evermore." To persons of every description is this direction addressed in the words before us; and the reasons upon which it is founded are declared. In conformity with the Apostle's views, we shall shew,

I. The effects of religion upon the different orders of society—

We shall notice them,

1. Upon the poor—

[These are represented as "exalted" by Christianity. Not that they are raised out of their proper sphere, or have

any right to assume consequence to themselves on account of their acquaintance with religion^a: but they are exalted in their *state and condition*, their *dispositions and habits*, their *hopes and prospects*.

The poor are for the most part regarded in so low and mean a light, that a rich man would be ashamed to acknowledge them as related to him: yea, they themselves feel a very humiliating disparity between themselves and their opulent neighbours. But, when once they embrace the Gospel, and are made "rich in faith," "God himself is not ashamed to be called their God:" he calls them "his friends," "his sons," "his peculiar treasure:" "he gives them a name better than of sons and of daughters." They instantly become "kings and priests unto God;" and the very angels in heaven account it an honour to wait upon them, as their ministering servants. In short, being born from above, they are sons of God, and "if sons, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." What an elevation is this! Surely, in comparison of it, all earthly dignities are no better than the baubles of children, or the conceits of maniacs.

When elevated thus, the poor begin to feel also dispositions suited to their state. While they are destitute of religion, they either riot in a licentious independence, without any regard to character, or, with a servility unrestrained by conscience, yield themselves willing instruments to any one that can reward their services. But when once they are taught of God, they learn primarily and solely to regard *his* will. We again say, that they will obey all the *lawful* commands of their superiors^b; *they will regard their authority as God's*, and do whatever is required of them, "*as unto the Lord*:" but their first inquiry will be, "What does my God require?" and, if urged to violate their duty to him, they will reply as the Apostles did, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye:" "we ought to obey God rather than men^c." Nor have they a lower standard of action than the most polished Christian upon earth: if they are truly upright before God, the rule by which they walk is that prescribed by the Apostle^d; and what can the highest refinement suggest more? Here therefore their elevation again appears, inasmuch as their habits are no longer formed by interest or the caprice of men, but founded on, and assimilated to, the mind and will of God.

As to the hopes of the poor, they have little to stimulate

^a Ignorant persons are sometimes faulty in this respect; but St. Paul strongly cautions all, and especially servants, upon this head. 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

^b Rom. xiii. 1, 2, 4. ^c Acts v. 29. ^d 1 Cor. vii. 21—23

their ambition. To provide for their present wants, and to lay up something for a time of sickness, is the utmost that the generality of them aspire to. But what glorious views does religion open to them! Truly, instead of looking up with admiration to the great and opulent, they rather stand on an eminence, from whence they can look down upon them with pity and compassion. What are the prospects of princes, to those which are unfolded to *their* view? They can look within the veil of heaven itself, and there see crowns and kingdoms reserved for them, yea, a seat upon the throne even of God himself. Who that contemplates this will not say that religion "exalts" the poor?]

2. Upon the rich—

[*These* religion humbles. It does not indeed despoil them of that honour which is due to their rank; (it rather confirms it to them^e;) but it humbles them *in their own estimation*, and *in the estimation of others*, and *in the daily habit of their minds*.

The rich are apt to arrogate much to themselves on account of their distinctions; and even before God to entertain high thoughts of themselves: "Our lips are our own: who is lord over *us*?" But let grace reach their hearts, and they no longer say, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" but, "I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And so far are they from despising the poor on account of the inferiority of their station, that they most gladly "condescend to men of low estate," and love them truly as brethren, notwithstanding they are "brethren only of low degree."

It is scarcely needful to say how much they are lowered also in the eyes of others. Only let them become true disciples of Christ, and it will soon appear that they have lost the esteem of an ungodly world. However wise or amiable they may be, the serpent's seed will hiss at them. Though David was a king, and as eminent for piety as man could be, he was the sport of fools, and "drunkards made songs upon him." If any qualities could have insured universal respect, the Lord Jesus Christ would have obtained it. But "he was despised and rejected of men:" and "if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household."

But though the contempt of men was once the most formidable of all evils, they are not much concerned at it now; for they are made "poor in spirit," and consequently regardless of the indignities that are offered to them. They know what they deserve at God's hands; and therefore they are willing

^e Rom. xiii. 7.

to bear any thing from those whom *He* may use as instruments of his indignation or love. They are willing also that God should deal with them in any way he may see fit; and whether he give or take away, they are ready to bless his holy name. They are brought to a state of mind resembling that of a man subsisting upon alms: "they come to their God and Saviour for gold, that they may be enriched; for eye-salve, that they may see; and for raiment, that the shame of their nakedness may not appear." They are contented, yea they are glad, to seek their daily bread at his hands, and to live altogether as pensioners on his grace and mercy. In short, as in their own estimation they are *vile and guilty*, so in the habit of their minds they are *meek, patient, submissive, and dependent*.

Thus, while the poor are elevated by religion, the rich "are reduced and made low."]

And what shall we say of these diversified effects? Are they represented as adverse to our happiness? No: we are rather led to contemplate,

II. The universal satisfaction which they are calculated to produce—

That the poor have cause to rejoice in their exaltation, is obvious enough—

[Think only what the poorest of the Lord's people are privileged to enjoy—

First, *they have the most exalted of all characters*.—Though some few of the Lord's people have been opulent, the generality have been "a poor and afflicted people." The Apostles had little else besides a scrip and a staff; they were "poor, though making many rich; and had nothing, though in some respects they possessed all things." When it pleased God also to send his only dear Son into the world, what was the state to which he appointed *him*? It was that of a poor man, who "had not where to lay his head." And has not this dignified the condition of the poor? Yea, have they not reason to glory, in being so assimilated to their Lord and Saviour? The tribe of Levi had no portion allotted to them in Israel: but were they therefore less honourable than the rest? No: the Lord was their portion: and their want of earthly possessions was a favour conferred, and not a privilege denied. Thus it is an honour to the poor that they have their *all* in God: and though flesh and blood cannot receive the saying, it is really a greater honour to be fed like Elijah from day to day by the special providence of God, than to be living upon stores collected by the hands of men.

Next, *they are in the most favourable of all states*.—Our adorable Saviour has determined this point beyond a doubt.

He has declared, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven:" "with men," he says, "it is altogether *impossible*." The Rich Youth perished only because he would not sacrifice his earthly possessions: had he been a poor man, he would in all probability have followed Christ, and have been at this moment in heaven. Besides, a rich man is afraid of being thought singular, if he "follow the Lord fully:" he fancies that his situation obliges him to conform to the customs of the world: he is ashamed to associate with the Lord's people: nor will he suffer any one to deal faithfully with him: but a poor man may follow his own ways, and seek instruction wherever he can obtain it; and nobody will trouble himself about him: his instructor also may, without compliment or circumlocution, come at once to the point, and "declare unto him all the counsel of God." What an advantage is this for the obtaining of everlasting happiness; and what a solid ground of joy to all who possess it.

Once more; *they have a sovereign antidote against all their disadvantages*.—Be it granted; they want the benefit of human learning: but they have the teachings of God's Spirit. They want many earthly comforts; but they have the promises of the living God. "Their afflictions may abound; but their consolations also abound by Christ." Whereinsoever they may be supposed to labour under any disadvantage, they have every thing that they need, treasured up for them in Christ Jesus; and out of his fulness they receive, in the time and measure which he knows to be best for them. Poor they may be in this world's goods; but they are enriched with "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Now let the poor say whether they have not reason to rejoice. Surely if they estimate their state aright, they may well "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified^f."]]

That the rich have equal reason to rejoice in their humiliation, is, though less obvious, not at all less true—

[What a mercy is it to them, that *they are brought to see the vanity of all their earthly distinctions*. In their unenlightened state, they have no conception how contemptible those things are, which they suppose to be of such mighty consequence. What is a high-sounding title, or a large estate, to a man that in a few hours is about to launch into eternity? Yet that is the real condition of all: we are like the grass, which by the influence of the sun and rain is brought forth rapidly into gay luxuriance, but by an eastern blast is withered

^f See Hab. iii. 17, 18.

in an hour. Every thing we possess is perishing; and we ourselves also are fading away in the midst of our enjoyments^g. Ungodly men do not like to reflect on these things; but the true Christian delights to realize them in his soul: and he well deserves our warmest congratulations, who has learned to estimate earthly things by the standard of truth.

It is also a mercy to the opulent servants of God, that *they are made to know wherein true honour and happiness consist*. That which may be possessed by the vilest, as well as by the best of men, can never constitute the chief good of man. But to be restored to the favour of God, to live in the enjoyment of his presence, to possess his image on our souls, to glorify him in the world, and to be growing up into a meetness for his everlasting inheritance, *this is honour, this is happiness*: and O! what a mercy is it to see and feel this! Happy art thou, whoever thou art, that hast lost thy relish for earthly vanities, and art brought to set thine affections upon things above!

Finally, it is a mercy past all conception to *have for their portion an inheritance that shall never fade*. Were they instantly, and of necessity, to be deprived of all they possess, we should still bid them to "rejoice that they were made low:" for earthly riches, however great, are only dung and dross in comparison of the Christian's portion. Let those who in this life "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods," say, whether they found any reason to alter their minds, when once they reached the mansions of bliss? How small do their sacrifices now appear, how unworthy of a single thought! Blessed then indeed are ye who are enabled to "forsake all and follow Christ:" even "in this world" he promises you "an hundred-fold;" but what ye shall possess in the world to come "no eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived."]

ADDRESS—

[But what shall we say, either to the poor or rich, who are destitute of an interest in Christ? Shall we bid them rejoice? What cause of joy have the poor, who, after all their trials and privations here, shall have no part or lot with the saints above? or what ground of glorying have the rich, who will so soon be "lifting up their eyes in torments, seeking in vain a drop of water to cool their tongues?" Should we attempt to console any from a consideration of their present attainments or possessions, the prophet would rebuke our folly, and dash the cup out of their hands^h. Be it known then to you all, that the

^g This is particularly noticed in the text, and amplified in the verse that follows it.

^h Jer. ix. 23, 24.

poor must be exalted here, if ever they would be exalted in a better world ; and the rich must be humbled here, if ever they would attain the true riches. The poor must be made partakers of a divine nature, before they can "inherit a throne of glory;" and the rich must be emptied of *self*, before they can be "filled with all the fulness of God."]

MMCCCLVI.

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD RESPECTING HIS TEMPTED PEOPLE.

Jam. i. 12. *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

UNDER the afflictions with which we are visited in this vale of tears, philosophy has suggested many grounds for resignation and submission : but to find in them matter for self-congratulation and joy, was beyond the reach of unassisted reason. To that however are we led by the voice of revelation, which teaches us to look with confidence to a future state, wherein all that we endure for God, and in meek submission to his will, shall be compensated with a weight of glory, proportioned to the trials we have here sustained for his sake, and the spiritual improvement which we have derived from them. St. James, who wrote to "his Jewish brethren who were scattered abroad" through the violence of persecution, frequently repeats this consolatory idea. He begins with bidding them to "count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations." Towards the close of his epistle he declares this to be at least the persuasion of his own mind ; "Behold, we count them happy that endure^a." But in the text he does not hesitate to affirm it as an unquestionable truth, that such persons are truly blessed : "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Now as he spake this by inspiration from God, I shall consider it as a

^a Jam. v. 11.

declaration from God himself; and shall unfold to you,

I. God's testimony respecting his tempted people—

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation”—

This sentiment doubtless, at first sight, appears very paradoxical—

[How can it be? Consider the state of God's tempted people. Consider only the lighter trials which they are called to bear for their Lord's sake: hatred, reproach, contempt, ridicule, the opposition of their nearest friends and relatives; this, every one that will follow the Lord Jesus Christ, must endure: a variety of circumstances may tend to screen a man from heavier trials; but these, in some measure at least, are the lot of all, even of the least and poorest of Christ's followers, as well as of the most conspicuous among them: let the light but shine even into the poorest cottage, and the surrounding darkness will evince its incapacity to maintain communion with it. But come to the severer trials which thousands have to sustain: think of privations, the most distressing that can be imagined to flesh and blood: think of bonds, and imprisonment: think of death in its most terrible and appalling forms: shall it be said that there is any blessedness in these? Must we not rather say, that the persons who are called to endure such things are in the most wretched state? Yes, I must confess, as St. Paul himself says, “If in this life only such persons have hope, they are of all men most miserable,” and altogether in a most pitiable condition. Nevertheless, whilst we heartily subscribe to this position of the Apostle, we must still say of the declaration in our text, that]

Yet it is most true—

[These sufferings must be viewed in their reference to eternity; and then they will wear a very different aspect from what they do when considered merely in themselves. For, “to those who love him and suffer for him, God has promised a crown of life, which they shall receive” at his hands the very instant that their sufferings are finished. Consider, “a crown!” the highest of all distinctions! “a crown of life!” not a corruptible one, like those which were given to the victors in the Olympic games; nor a temporary one, which is soon to be transferred to a successor;—a crown of life and glory, which fadeth not away! Conceive of the saint as just entering into the eternal world, and ascending to heaven from the flames of martyrdom: what a cloud of witnesses come forth to congratulate him on his victory, and to welcome him to those blest abodes! Behold him welcomed too by his Lord and Master,

for whose name he has suffered, and under whose banners he has fought: hear the plaudit with which he is received, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." See the crown brought forth, and put upon his head; and behold him seated on the very throne of God himself, according to that promise, "To him that overcometh, will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne:" I say, behold these things, and then tell me, whether the prospect of such glory, assured to him by the promise and oath of God, did not constitute him blessed in the midst of all his sufferings? Of the myriads, respecting whom it is said, "These all came out of great tribulation," do you suppose there is one who regrets the sufferings he once endured for the sake of Christ? Not one assuredly: not one, who does not congratulate himself that he was ever counted worthy to suffer for the Redeemer's sake. But is St. James peculiar in his sentiments on this head? No; our blessed Lord bids all "who suffer for righteousness' sake, to rejoice and leap for joy^b:" and to the same effect speak all his holy Apostles^c. Though therefore "no suffering is for the present joyous, but grievous," yet, taken in connexion with their present consolations, and with all the future consequences, sufferings may justly be regarded as grounds of self-congratulation and joy^d.]

Such then being God's testimony, I proceed to set before you,

II. Some instructions arising out of it—

There are in our text several instructive hints, which ought not to be overlooked—

1. We should so love the Lord Jesus Christ, as to be willing to suffer for him—

[Love, even amongst men, is of little value, if it will make no sacrifices for the object beloved. But the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all the love that can ever be exercised towards him. Consider only what love he has manifested towards us: how he left the bosom of his Father for us, and emptied himself of all his glory, in order to assume our nature, and to expiate by his own blood the sins of the whole world: is it a mere cold esteem that is a proper return for such love? When the terms on which alone he could save the world were proposed to him, he said, "Lo! I come, I delight to do thy will, O God." When he then proposes that we, in testimony of our

^b Matt. v. 10—12. ^c Rom. v. 3. 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

^d Phil. ii. 17, 18.

love to him, should “take up our cross and follow him,” shall we draw back, and complain that his yoke is too heavy for us? Of what value will he account such love as that? Go, he will say, and “offer it to your earthly friend,” and see whether he will value it^e: how much less then is it suited to express your obligations to me, who have redeemed you to God with my own blood!

It is worthy of observation, that the same person who in the first clause of the text is spoken of as “enduring temptation,” in the last clause is characterized as “loving God:” for, in fact, none will suffer for him who do not love him; nor can any love him without being willing to suffer for him. If therefore we profess love to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ whilst yet we are afraid of bearing the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world for his sake, we only deceive our own souls: for he has plainly told us, that he will consider none as his disciples, who will not take up their cross daily and follow him. He has told us, that, if we are ashamed of him and deny him, he will be ashamed of us and deny us: and that those only who are willing to lay down their lives for his sake, shall ever save them unto life eternal.

I pray you, brethren, try your love to the Saviour by this touchstone: and never imagine that it is sincere, unless it will stand this test — — —]

2. We should so apprehend God’s promises, as utterly to despise men’s threats—

[“Exceeding great and precious are the promises which God has given unto them that love him:” nor is it possible for us to be in any situation, wherein he has not made ample provision for our support and consolation. Now these promises are all sure and certain: “they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus:” nor can so much as one jot or tittle of them ever fail. But look at the threatenings of man; how empty and vain are they! The whole universe combined cannot effect the smallest thing without God’s special permission: and, if permitted to execute their purposes, how impotent is their rage, when God is pleased to interpose in behalf of his people! Fire could not hurt the Hebrew Youths, nor lions injure the defenceless Daniel, nor chains and dungeons confine Peter on the eve of his intended execution. Men, the most potent monarchs not excepted, are no more than an axe or saw in the hand of God, who uses it, or not, according to his own sovereign will, and for the promotion only of his own glory. “Who then art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of a son of man that shall be as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy

^e Mal. i. 8.

Maker?" Besides, suppose man to prevail to the extent of his wishes; what can he do? He can only reach the body: the soul he cannot touch. "Fear not man therefore, who can only kill the body, and after that hath no more that he can do; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him." And, as God has promised that "our strength shall be proportioned to our day" of trial, let us rest on his word, and hold in utter contempt all the menaces of our most potent enemies^f.]

3. We should so realize eternity as to rise superior to all the concerns of time and sense—

[In the view of eternity, all that relates to time vanishes, as the twinkling star before the mid-day sun. If we could suppose a man caught up, like the Apostle Paul, to the third heavens, and then sent down again to abide a few more years upon earth, what would be his estimate of those things which so occupy and enslave our carnal minds? The baubles of children would not be more contemptible in his eyes than the glittering pageantry of courts: and, though the sufferings which are sometimes inflicted on the saints are heavy, they would be reckoned by him as "not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall ere long be revealed in us." But it is not needful that we be transported to heaven to this end: we have the whole set before us in the oracles of God: and, if we believe those oracles, we may be as fully convinced of the comparative insignificance of earthly things, as if we saw the crown of glory with our bodily eyes, or already tasted of the heavenly bliss. Let us then seek that "faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Then shall we, like those of old, "take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, knowing that we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance;" and, with Moses, shall "esteem even the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt."]

^f See Isai. xxxvii. 22.

MMCCCLVII.

SIN THE OFFSPRING OF OUR OWN HEARTS.

Jam. i. 13—15. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

THERE are temptations necessarily connected with the Christian life, and which often, through the weakness of our nature, become the *occasions* of sin: and there are other temptations which are the direct and immediate *cause* of sin. The former are external; the latter are within a man's own bosom. The former may be referred to God as their author, and be considered as a ground of joy: the latter must be traced to our own wicked hearts; and are proper grounds of the deepest humiliation. This distinction is made in the passage before us. In the foregoing verses the former are spoken of^a; in the text, the latter.

In the words of our text, we notice the *origin*, the *growth*, and the *issue* of sin. We notice,

I. Its origin—

Many are ready to trace their sin to God himself—

[This is done when we say, “I could not help it:” for then we reflect on our Maker, as not enduing us with strength sufficient for our necessities. It is done also, though not quite so directly, when we ascribe our fall to those who were in some respect accessory to it: for then we blame the providence of God, as before we did his creative power. It was thus that Adam acted, when he imputed his transgression to the influence of his wife, and ultimately to God who gave her to him^b.]

But God neither is, nor can be, the Author of sin—

[He may, and does, try men, in order to exercise their graces, and to shew what he has done for their souls. Thus he tempted Abraham, and Job, and Joseph, and many others. But these very instances prove that he did not necessitate, or in any respect influence, them to sin; for they shone the brighter in proportion as they were tried. But he never did, nor ever will, lead any man into sin. And though he is said to have “hardened Pharaoh's heart,” and to have “moved David to number the people,” he did not either of these things in any other way than by leaving them to themselves^c.]

^a ver. 2, 12.

^b Gen. iii. 12.

^c Exod. iv. 21. and 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. with 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

All sin must be traced to the evil propensities of our own nature—

[“A clean thing cannot be brought out of an unclean;” and therefore no descendant of Adam can be free from sin. We have within us a secret bias to sin; which, however good our direction appear to be, operates at last to turn us from God. That bias is called “lust,” or desire, or concupiscence: and it works in all, though in a great variety of degrees and manner. All sin is fruit proceeding from this root, even from “the lust that wars in our members;” and in whatever channel our iniquity may run, it must be traced to that as its genuine and proper source.]

This will appear more strongly, while we mark,

II. Its growth—

Its first formation in the soul is often slow and gradual—

[“Lust,” or our inward propensity to sin, presents something to our imagination as likely to gratify us in a high degree. Whether it be profit, or pleasure, or honour, we survey it with a longing eye, and thereby our desire after it is inflamed. Conscience perhaps suggests that it is forbidden fruit which we are coveting; and that, as being prohibited, it will ultimately tend rather to produce misery than happiness. In opposition to this, our sinful principle intimates a doubt whether the gratification be forbidden; or at least whether, in our circumstances, the tasting of it be not very allowable: at all events, it suggests that our fellow-creatures will know nothing respecting it; that we may easily repent of the evil; and that God is very ready to forgive; and that many who have used far greater liberties are yet happy in heaven; and that, consequently, we may enjoy the object of our desire, without suffering any loss or inconvenience. In this manner the affections are kindled, and the will is bribed to give its consent^d: then the bait is swallowed, the hook is fastened within us; and we are “dragged away^e” from God, from duty, from happiness; yea, if God do not seasonably interpose, we are drawn to everlasting perdition.]

Its progress to maturity is generally rapid—

[The metaphor of a fœtus formed in the womb, and brought afterwards to the birth, is frequently used in Scripture in reference to sin^f. When the will has consented to

^d Isai. xliv. 20. See this whole process illustrated, Gen. iii. 1—6.

^e These seem to be the precise ideas intended to be conveyed by *δεδραζόμενος και ἐξελακόμενος*.

^f Job xv. 35. Ps. vii. 14. with the text.

comply with the suggestions of the evil principle, then the embryo of sin is, if we may so speak, formed within us; and nothing remains but for time and opportunity to bring it forth. This of course must vary with the circumstances under which we are: our wishes may be accomplished, or may prove abortive: but whether our desire be fulfilled or not, sin is imputed to us, because it formally exists within us: or rather it is brought to the birth, though not altogether in the way we hoped and expected.]

We proceed to notice,

III. Its issue—

Sin was never barren; its issue is numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore: but in every instance the name of its first-born has been “death.” Death is,

1. Its penalty—

[Death temporal, spiritual, and eternal, was threatened as the punishment of transgression while our first parents were yet in paradise. And on many occasions has the threatening been renewed^g — — — So that sin and death are absolutely inseparable.]

2. Its desert—

[The fixing of death as the consequence of transgression was no arbitrary appointment. The penal evil of death is no more than the moral evil of sin. Consider the extreme malignity of sin: What rebellion against God! What a dethroning of God from our hearts! What a preferring of Satan himself, and his service, to God’s light and easy yoke! View it as it is seen in the agonies and death of God’s only Son: Can that be of small malignity which so oppressed and overwhelmed “Jehovah’s fellow?” Of those who are now suffering the torments of the damned, not one would dare to arraign the justice of God, or to say that his punishment exceeded his offence: whatever we in our present state may think, our mouths will all be shut, when we have juster views, and an experimental sense, of the bitterness of sin^h.]

3. Its tendency—

[We may see the proper effect of sin in the conduct of Adam, when he fled from God, whom he had been accustomed to meet with familiarity and joyⁱ. He felt a consciousness that his soul was bereft of innocence; and he was unable to endure the sight of Him whom he had so greatly offended. In the

^g Ezek. xviii. 4. Rom. i. 18. and vi. 21, 23. Gal. iii. 10.

^h Matt. xxii. 12.

ⁱ Gen. iii. 8.

same manner sin affects our minds: it indisposes us for communion with God; it unfits us for holy exercises: and, if a person under the guilt and dominion of it were admitted into heaven, he would be unable to participate the blessedness of those around him; and would rather hide himself under rocks and mountains, than dwell in the immediate presence of a holy God. Annihilation would be to him the greatest favour that could be bestowed upon him; so truly does the Apostle say, that "the motions of sin do work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death^k."]

ADVICE—

1. Do not palliate sin—

[Though circumstances doubtless may either lessen or increase the guilt of sin, nothing under heaven can render it light or venial. Our temptations may be great; but nothing can hurt us, if we do not ourselves concur with the tempter. That wicked fiend exercised all his malice against our adorable Lord; but could not prevail, because there was nothing in him to second or assist his efforts. So neither could he overcome us, if we did not voluntarily submit to his influence. All sin therefore must be traced to the evil dispositions of our own hearts; and consequently affords us a just occasion to humble ourselves before God in dust and ashes. If we presume to reflect on God as the author of our sin, we increase our guilt a hundred-fold: it is only in abasing ourselves that we can at all hope for mercy and forgiveness.]

2. Do not trifle with temptation—

[We carry about with us much inflammable matter, if we may so speak; and temptation strikes the spark which produces an explosion. How readily are evil thoughts suggested by what we see or hear; and how strongly do they fix upon the mind! "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" Let us then stand at a distance from the places, the books, the company, that may engender sin. And let us, in conformity with our Lord's advice, "watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation."]

3. Do not for one moment neglect the Saviour—

[There is none but Jesus that can stand between sin and death. Indeed even "he overcame death only by dying" in our stead: and we can escape it only by believing in him. We deserve death: we have deserved it for every sin we have ever committed. Ten thousand deaths are our proper portion. Let us then look to Him who died for us. Let us look to

^k Rom. vii. 5.

him, not only for the sins committed long ago, but for those of daily incursion. Our best act would condemn us, if he did not "bear the iniquity of our holy things." He is our only deliverer from the wrath to come: to Him therefore let us flee continually, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

MMCCCLVIII.

GOD THE ONLY SOURCE OF ALL GOOD.

Jam. i. 16, 17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

THERE is much evil in the world. But people are little aware from whence it proceeds. We forget that at the first creation there was no such thing as evil, either natural or moral, in the whole universe. God, it is true, could have prevented the existence of it: and so he could have prevented the existence of the world itself, which only came into being through the operation of his sovereign will and of his almighty power. It is not for us to inquire, why he permitted evil to exist. Doubtless he will ultimately be glorified in all that he has *done*, yea and, *on the whole*, in all that he has *permitted*, though we cannot exactly say how that glory shall accrue to him. All that we, in our present state, are called to, is, to feel and to maintain that he does all things well: that, however he may *permit*, he does not *do* evil; but that, on the contrary, all good, and nothing but good, is to be ascribed to him.

Now it is of great importance that we should, at least as far as regards ourselves, have just views of this matter, since for want of them we greatly err. So the Apostle evidently intimates in the words which we have read: from whence I will take occasion to shew,

I. The true character of the Deity—

He is here declared to be *the only*, and *the unchanging* source of all good—

1. He is *the only* source of all good—

[The sun in the material world may properly be called “the father of lights,” because there is no light but what proceeds from him. The moon and stars only reflect the light which they receive from him. Thus is God to the whole creation the only source of light and life. There is no “good and perfect gift,” but proceeds from him. *In nature*, all the worlds were framed by him, and every thing in them was fitted for its peculiar use, and for the benefit of the whole. *In providence*, every thing is ordered with unerring wisdom to subserve the designs of God, and to accomplish his holy will, yea, and ultimately to further the welfare of all his chosen people — — — *In grace* this appears in a still more striking point of view. Every good disposition is formed by him in the heart of man, which, without the agency of his Spirit, would continue one entire and unaltered mass of corruption through all eternity. If we either will or do any thing that is good, it is in consequence of his electing love and sovereign grace^a — — —]

2. He is *the unchanging* source of all good—

[If in the communication of good he in some respects resembles the sun, he in other respects differs widely from it. The sun, though the fittest emblem that we have of immutability in dispensing good, has yet its changes, both annual and diurnal, and at different seasons of the day and year, casts its shadows in a widely different form, according to the quarter in which it shines, and to its position in our hemisphere, as more vertical or horizontal. But not so Jehovah, the Father of all heavenly lights. There are no changes with him^b. “With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” To his believing people he is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^c.” True, his light may be intercepted by a cloud: but he himself remains the same: and let only the cloud be dispelled, and he will shine as bright as ever on the believing soul — — —]

Now that you may see how important this view of the Deity is, I beg you to notice,

II. The errors we run into for want of duly advert-
ing to it—

We err exceedingly,

1. In a way of self-vindication—

[This is the precise point to which St. James directs our attention. After saying, “Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any man: but every man, when he is

^a Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^b Mal. iii. 6.

^c Heb. xiii. 5, 8.

tempted, is drawn away of his own lust and enticed;" he adds, "Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning:" *Evil is from yourselves, and from yourselves alone: good, and only good, is from God.*

Now you cannot but know, that, like our first parents, we are ever ready to exculpate ourselves, and to cast the blame of our sins, either on the tempters that led us to them, or on the propensities which God himself has implanted in us. But in both of these cases we do, in fact, cast the blame on God, as either immediately or remotely the cause of the evils we commit. But beware of all excuses, be they what they may. The fault is all your own, and nothing but humiliation and contrition will become you to the latest hour of your lives — — — *If ever you perish, you will have none but yourselves to blame.*]

2. In a way of self-dependence—

[We are ever prone to look for some good in ourselves, instead of seeking all good from God alone. But it is in vain to rely on any wisdom of our own to guide us, or strength of our own to support us, or righteousness of our own to justify us. Satan himself may as well look for these things in himself as we: and it is on this account that God has been "pleased to treasure up in his dear Son a fulness of them, that we may receive them all from him" from day to day, and from hour to hour. Know ye this, that in yourselves "ye are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and "from Christ alone can ye ever receive raiment to cover you, or gold to enrich you, or the eye-salve" that shall administer healing to your organs of vision. "All your fresh springs must be in God," even in God alone — — —]

3. In a way of self-applause—

[We are no less prone to take to ourselves credit from what is good, than to shift off from ourselves blame in what is evil. But "if we differ from others or from our former selves, who is it that has made us to differ? or what have we that we have not received from God himself?" As well might the earth boast of its fertility independently of the sun, whose genial rays have called it forth, as we arrogate to ourselves honour on account of any good that we have ever done. If you would see what the earth would be independent of the sun, go to the polar regions in the depth of winter. And, if you would see what you yourselves would be independent of God, go down to that place where God never comes by the operations of his grace, and where the damned spirits are left without controul. If there be any good in you, it is from Christ that you have

received it: for "without him you could do nothing." If you have attained to any thing more than ordinary, you must say, "He that hath wrought me to the self-same thing is God." Even if you equalled the Apostle Paul in holiness, you must say, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" and in reference to every individual act, "It was not I, but the grace of God that was with me^d."]]

APPLICATION—

"Do not err then, my beloved brethren"—

[Be aware of your tendencies; and remember how to correct them. You never can err in taking shame to yourselves: nor can you ever err in giving glory to God. But if you arrogate any thing to yourselves, you will rob God: and, in robbing him, you will eventually, and to your utter ruin, rob yourselves.]"]

^d 1 Cor. xv. 10.

MMCCCLIX.

REGENERATION—ITS AUTHOR, MEANS, AND END.

Jam. i. 18. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.*

THERE is an evil in the world so monstrous and so horrible, that one can scarcely conceive how it should ever be committed; namely, the ascribing unto God our own iniquities, and tracing them to him as their proper author. Yet is this the common refuge of sinners; who, when led captive by their own lusts, excuse themselves by averring, that no criminality can attach to the indulgence of passions which God himself has given them. But St. James protests against this impiety, and declares, that "God tempteth no man; but that every man who yields to temptation, is drawn away and enticed by his own lust^a." Another evil also he sets himself to counteract, namely, the tracing of good to ourselves, as though it originated with us as its proper authors. This, though it does not shock our feelings so much as the former does, yet is of the same nature with it, and no less offensive in the sight of God: for, whilst

^a ver. 13, 14.

the former sentiment makes God the cause of evil, the latter denies him to be the cause of good. But on this subject also St. James rectifies our views; assuring us, that, as all light proceeds from the sun, so does "every good and perfect gift come down from above, even from God the Father of lights." We may indeed have great changes, as from day to night, or from summer to winter: but these arise from ourselves only; for "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" and, if we have less abundant communications from him at one time than another, it is owing to the change of our position with respect to him, and to our temporary departure from him. If, on the contrary, a spiritual change has taken place in any of us, so that we have been born again, it is because "he begat us with the word of truth;" and begat us, not on account of any merit in us, but purely "of his own will," and "to the praise of the glory of his own grace."

In this assertion of the Apostle the whole subject of regeneration or conversion comes before us: and we shall be led to mark,

I. The source from whence it flows—

It is not from man—

[Man has neither power nor inclination to convert himself truly and thoroughly to God. If only we consider what is said in the Scriptures respecting the extreme weakness of man in relation to every thing that is spiritually good,—that "without Christ he can *do* nothing;" that "no man can *say* that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost;" and that "we are not of ourselves sufficient even to *think* any thing that is good;" that our sufficiency even for that is of God alone,—how can it be thought that we should be able to "put off the old man and to put on the new," and to "renew ourselves in the spirit of our minds after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness?" The very terms in which this change is spoken of, as a resurrection, a new birth, a new creation, clearly import, that it is beyond the power of man to effect it in himself. We need go no further than to the image used in the text itself, to shew the utter absurdity of any such idea. Nor have any others a power to effect it in us: for man can only address himself to our outward senses: he has no access whatever to our hearts; he can therefore never accomplish in

us so great a work, as that of "giving us a new heart, and renewing a right spirit within us."

Nor has any man the inclination thus to renew himself. Let us look around, and see what is the state of mankind at large. Are they mourning over their degeneracy and corruption? Are they panting after holiness? Are they using the means which are confessedly within their reach? Are they thankful for every aid they can receive, and for every instruction by which their good desires may be furthered? If you think they are, take your Bible with you, and go to all your neighbours and proffer your assistance to them, and solicit a reciprocal aid from them: act as if you all were shipwrecked, and all were anxious for their own personal welfare, and for the welfare of those around them. Do this, and you will soon see how much inclination men have for a thorough conversion of their souls to God.]

It is from God, and from God alone—

[This we are not left to determine by any fallible reasonings of our own: it is decided for us by God himself; who, speaking of all who received the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby received power to become the sons of God, says, "They were born, not of blood (or in consequence of their descent from any particular parents), nor of the will of the flesh (that is, from any good desires of their own), nor of the will of man (that is, from the kind efforts of others), but of God^b." It is God alone who makes one to differ from another^c: it is "God alone who gives us either to will, or to do^d," what is good: and "He who is the Author, is also the Finisher^e," of all that can issue in a man's salvation.]

But as God is pleased to use means and instruments in this work, I will proceed to shew,

II. The means by which it is effected—

It becomes not us to restrict God in the use of means. We know that he frequently makes use of

^b John i. 12, 13.

^c 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^d Phil. ii. 13.

^e Heb. xii. 2. How all this accords with the doctrines of the Church of England, may be seen by referring to our Articles and Liturgy:—In our Liturgy we thus address the Deity: "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." And the tenth Article runs thus: "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

affliction, and of conversation; and we will not presume to say that he never employs even dreams or visions for the attainment of his ends: we know assuredly that he has done so in former times; and therefore he *may* do so at this time (we confess, however, that we are not partial to any thing arising out of *such* means: we are always fearful that they will issue in something transient and delusive: we prefer infinitely what proceeds from causes more rational, and more tangible, and more consonant with the dispensation under which we live); but we are not at liberty to *limit* God to any particular mode of communicating his blessings to mankind. Of one thing however we are sure (and that will effectually cut off all occasion for enthusiastic delusions); namely, that whatever means God makes use of to bring the soul to a consideration of its state, it is “by the word of truth” alone that he savingly converts it to himself. *By other means he may call our attention to the word*; but by the word only does he guide us to the knowledge of his truth, and to the attainment of his salvation.

By the word he begins the good work within us—

[It is from thence alone that we attain the knowledge of our fallen state — — — From thence alone can we learn the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer — — — From thence alone can we derive encouragement to lay hold on the hope that is set before us: for the only legitimate object of faith is the word of God; and “without faith, so grounded, we cannot possibly please God^f.”]

By the word also he carries it on, and perfects it, within us—

[“The word is that unadulterated milk by which the new-born babes must grow^g.” And, whatever degrees of sanctification are produced in us at a more advanced period, they are effected by the same divine instrument; as St. Paul has said: “Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water *by the word*, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish^h.” Hence our

^f Heb. xi. 6.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^h Eph. v. 26, 27.

blessed Lord, when praying for his Church, said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truthⁱ." Not that the word has this power in itself: for thousands both hear and read it without deriving any benefit from it to their souls. It is "the sword of the Spirit^k;" and effects no more than what He who wields it sees fit to accomplish. If it "come in word only," it is of no weight at all: but when it "comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power^l," then "it effects all for which God himself has sent it^m:" and "*through him* is mighty to the pulling down of all the strong-holdsⁿ" of sin and Satan.]

Thus is the whole work of grace wrought within us: and a blessed work it will appear, whilst we shew,

III. The end for which it is wrought—

The contemplation of this may well reconcile us to all that has been said about the sovereign will of God. The ground on which men are so jealous of the Divine sovereignty is, that they think it leads to a disregard of holiness; since, if God have chosen men to salvation, they shall attain it without holiness; and if he have not chosen them to salvation, they can never be saved, how holy soever they may be. But this is altogether an erroneous statement. God is not so regardless of holiness as this supposes: on the contrary, if he elect any, it is "that they may be holy, and without blame before him in love^o;" and, if "he beget any with the word of truth," it is "that we may be to him a kind of first-fruits of his creatures"—

[The "first-fruits" were, by God's own appointment, holy; so that every one was bound to consecrate them unto him^p. In like manner are God's people to be holy, and altogether devoted to his service. They are on no account to imagine themselves at their own disposal: "They are God's; and must glorify him with their body and their spirit, which are his^q."

It is not to salvation *only* that God ordains his people; but to sanctification, as the way to, and the preparation for, the blessedness of heaven^r. "He has chosen them *out of the world^s,*" from which "they are to be separated^t," as the first-fruits are

ⁱ John xvii. 17.

^k Eph. vi. 17.

^l 1 Thess. i. 5. and ii. 13.

^m Isai. lv. 10, 11.

ⁿ 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^o Eph. i. 4.

^p Deut. xviii. 4.

^q 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

^r 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^s John xv. 19.

^t 2 Cor. vi. 17.

from the remainder of the harvest. Being “a chosen generation, they are to be a peculiar people^u,” “zealous of good works^x.” To this “the word of truth” bears testimony in every part. To think that God should “beget” any person by his word and Spirit, and leave him at liberty to be a servant of sin and Satan, is a thought from which one revolts with utter abhorrence. Thus at least did St. Paul: “Is Christ the minister of sin? God forbid^y.” “Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid^z.” “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid^a.” “God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness:” and, whatever men may say respecting God’s “will” in ordaining us to life, or respecting our relation to him as his children, “begotten of him,” this is a truth that must never for one moment be questioned, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord^b.”]

SEE then that you,

1. Value the ordinances of God—

[The word is doubtless to be read with care and diligence at home: for, as we have said, it is the food of God’s new-born offspring, and the great medium by which he communicates his blessings to the soul. But it is through the ministry of that word that God chiefly works. He will bless those who read it in their own houses: but he will bless also, and more abundantly, those who at the same time attend upon the ministration of it by those whom he has sent to speak in his name; for “he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” Let not any think light of the ordinances, because the persons who dispense them are weak as other men: for “God has put his treasure into earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellency of the power may the more manifestly appear to be of him.” If indeed men look to the instrument, they will meet with nothing but disappointment: but if they will look through the instrument to God, they shall find the “word as quick and powerful^c” as ever, and shall experience it to be “the power of God unto their everlasting salvation^d.” There is no blessing which God will not dispense to them by means of it — — — Nor, if only they mix faith with what they hear^e, shall their most enlarged expectations of “profit” ever be disappointed.]

2. Labour to improve them for their destined end—

^u 2 Pet. ii. 9.

^z Rom. vi. 15.

^c Heb. iv. 12.

^x Tit. ii. 14.

^a Rom. vi. 1, 2.

^d Rom. i. 16.

^y Gal. ii. 17.

^b Heb. xii. 14.

^e Heb. iv. 2.

[Sanctification, as you have heard, is that for which both the word and ordinances are to be improved. Examine then yourselves by what you hear, that you may find out every defect in your obedience; and keep in remembrance both the precepts and examples that are set before you, that so you may attain to the highest degrees of holiness, and “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^f.” You know, that to appropriate any of the first-fruits to a common use would have been sacrilege: beware then lest the world rob God of any measure of those services which are due to him alone. You are to be his wholly and altogether: “your bodies are to be his,” and “your members instruments of righteousness unto him^g.” Your souls, with all their faculties, are to be his also; his temple, wherein he is to reside; his throne, wherein he is to reign: “your whole body, soul, and spirit are to be sanctified wholly unto him^h :” you are to be altogether “a living sacrifice unto him :” and this is no other than “your reasonable serviceⁱ.” And, as it is by this only that you can make a due improvement of ordinances, so it is by this only that you can have in your own souls any evidence that you are born of God. As for others, they can form no judgment at all of you, but by your works. The rule for them to judge by, is this: “He that committeth sin is of the devil: whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed, namely, the word of God, abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God^k.” Press forward then for the highest attainments, that, “being blameless and harmless, and without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, ye may shine as lights in the world, and approve yourselves indeed to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty^l.”]

^f Col. iv. 12.

^g Rom. vi. 13.

^h 1 Thess. v. 23.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 1.

^k 1 John iii. 8, 9. “*The seed*” in this passage means *the word*: see 1 Pet. i. 23. and 1 John ii. 14.

^l Phil. ii. 15, 16.

MMCCCLX.

THE REWARD OF OBEYING THE GOSPEL.

Jam. i. 25. *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

A PROFESSION of religion without the practice of it will avail us little. Obvious as this truth is, it

needs to be frequently insisted on. Even in the Apostle's days there were many who "professed to know God, while in works they denied him." St. James wrote his epistle with a more immediate view to such persons. He tells them plainly that they only "deceive their own selves^a:" but affirms with equal confidence that the practical Christian shall be blessed.

We shall consider,

I. The Apostle's description of the Gospel—

The Gospel is generally thought to be a mere system of restraints—

But it is, in truth, a "law of liberty"—

[It finds us under a worse than Egyptian bondage; and proclaims liberty from our oppressive yoke^b. It offers pardon to those who are under the condemnation of *the law*; and freedom from *sin* to those over whom it has had dominion. It rescues us from the captivity in which *Satan* has held us; it breaks the fetters whereby *the world* has retained its ascendancy over us; and opens the way for the unrestrained observance of holy duties. It is to captive sinners, what the jubilee-trumpet was to the enslaved Jews^c; and effects for the imprisoned soul what the angel wrought for Peter^d. This liberty however it proclaims with the authority of a "law." It does not merely offer what we may alter or reject: it is properly called by the Apostle "the law of faith." It prescribes the only possible method of obtaining salvation; it declares that all attempts to find out another will be vain^e; and it enjoins us to embrace this at the peril of our souls^f.]

It is justly called a "perfect" law of liberty—

[Nothing can be *added to it* to render it more effectual: neither ceremonial nor moral duties can at all improve Christ's finished work^g. It will be utterly made void also, if any thing be *taken from it*. The blood of Christ, not any work of ours, must be regarded as *the price* of our redemption^h; and the liberty itself must be received as *the gift of God through faith*ⁱ. The Gospel is perfect also with respect to its effects upon the conscience. The Mosaic sacrifices were little more than remembrances of sins^k; but in the Gospel we have a

^a ver. 22.

^b Isai. lxi. 1.

^c Lev. xxv. 9, 10.

^d Acts xii. 7—10.

^e 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^f 1 John iii. 23.

^g Gal. v. 2, 4.

^h 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 8.

^k Heb. x. 3.

sacrifice that takes away our sinⁱ. The soul, once purged by the Redeemer's blood, is cleansed for ever^m; and, once freed by his almighty grace, is free indeedⁿ!]

This beautiful view of the Gospel will easily account for,

II. The regard which the Christian pays to it—

A man immured in a dungeon, would not treat with indifference a proclamation of pardon; nor can he who is in earnest about salvation, disregard the Gospel—

He endeavours to understand it—

[He does not inspect it to gratify a foolish curiosity: he searches into it with care and diligence. Like the Bereans of old, he maturely weighs its declarations^o, and “proves all things in it, that he may hold fast that which is good.” Even the angels themselves desire to investigate its mysteries: much more does he, who feels so great an interest in its contents. Nor does he do this in a transient manner, but with persevering diligence^p.]

He labours also to obey it—

[What he hears or reads is not suffered to escape his memory: he at least “gives earnest heed to it, lest at any time he should let it slip.” He cannot be satisfied to “see his face in a glass, and presently to forget what manner of man he was^q,” he desires to have the word engraven on his heart, and transcribed into his life. When he hears of liberty, he feels a solicitude to obtain it; or, having obtained it, he strives to honour his almighty Deliverer. He is well aware

ⁱ John i. 29.

^m Heb. x. 14.

ⁿ John viii. 36.

^o Acts xvii. 11.

^p It is worthy of observation that as St. Peter, speaking of the angels, uses the word *παρακύνψαι* in reference to the bending posture of the cherubims that were over the ark, 1 Pet. i. 12; so St. James, speaking of the Christian, uses both *παρακύνψας* and *παραμείνας*, in reference to the continuance of the cherubims in that posture. The ark was an eminent type of Christ; in it was contained the law; and over it was placed the mercy-seat: overshadowing all, were the cherubims of glory; Heb. ix. 4, 5. These things were typical of evangelical truths; Heb. x. 1. They represented God as reconciled to us through Christ, by whom the law was kept inviolate: compare Ps. xl. 7, 8. with Heb. x. 7. And the cherubims represented, not angels only, but men also, as contemplating and searching into this stupendous mystery.

^q ver. 23, 24.

that his pretensions to faith must be supported by a suitable life and conversation^r; and it is his determination, through grace, to shew forth his faith by his works.]

That he does not find it vain to serve God, will appear by considering,

III. The reward which he ensures to himself thereby—

The world suppose that the service of God is irksome and unprofitable; but the Christian can attest the contrary from his own experience—

In the very act of obeying he finds a rich reward—

[He can adopt, in reference to the law, the declaration of St. Paul^s—. However strict the commandments be, he does not account them grievous^t: on the contrary, he feels “the ways of religion to be pleasantness and peace^u.” His deliverance from impetuous passions is no small source of happiness: his exercise of benevolent affections greatly tranquillizes his mind^x. The testimony of his own conscience is a rich and continual feast^y. Moreover God himself will vouchsafe to him delightful tokens of his approbation. HE will shed abroad his love in the hearts of his faithful servants; HE will lift upon them the light of his applauding countenance; and “seal them with the Spirit of promise, as the earnest of their inheritance.” Thus, in the most literal sense, is that expression realized^z; and the description, alluded to in the text, is abundantly verified^a.]

A still more glorious recompence also awaits him in the future world—

[Many are extremely cautious of asserting this truth. They are afraid lest they should be thought to be advocates for the doctrine of human merit; but there is no truth more clear than that our works shall be rewarded^b. Nor does this at all interfere with the doctrines of grace. Our persons and our services are equally accepted through Christ^c, and our happiness will be altogether the gift of God for his sake: but our works will assuredly be the measure of our reward^d, and we may with propriety be stimulated by the hope of a future recompence^e. Let the Christian then know, that not the

^r Jam. ii. 17—20.

^s Rom. vii. 22.

^t 1 John v. 3.

^u Prov. iii. 17.

^x Isai. xxxii. 17.

^y 2 Cor. i. 12.

^z Ps. xix. 11.

^a Ps. i. 1—3.

^b Rom. ii. 6.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^e Heb. xi. 26.

meanest of his services shall be forgotten^f; but that his weight of glory shall be proportioned to his services^g.]

ADDRESS—

1. The inconsiderate hearers—

[It is obvious that many hear the word without receiving any saving benefit. This is owing to their own carelessness and inattention. They are like the way-side hearers, from whom Satan catches away the word^h; but such hearers do not merely lose the blessings which the faithful Christian obtains. If the word be not “a savour of life, it becomes a savour of death, to their souls.” O that all would remember the admonition once given to the Jewsⁱ—. Thus should they know the truth, and the truth should make them free^k.]

2. The practical hearers—

[You have been brought from bondage to liberty, from darkness to light; and, doubtless, you experience the blessedness of doing the will of God. “Stand fast then in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free;” “and be not entangled again with any yoke of bondage.” Shew that you consider God’s service as perfect freedom. Seek to have your very “thoughts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^l.” Thus shall your “peace flow down like a river;” and abundant treasures be laid up for you in the heavenly kingdom^m.]

^f Matt. x. 42.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^h Matt. xiii. 19.

ⁱ John xii. 48.

^k John viii. 32.

^l 2 Cor. x. 5.

^m Matt. vi. 20.

MMCCCLXI.

SELF-DECEIT EXPOSED.

Jam. i. 26. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.*

IF there be persons in the present day who pervert the doctrines of the Gospel, and take occasion from them to depreciate morality, we must not wonder at it, since this evil obtained to a very great extent even in the apostolic age. It was with a view to persons of this description chiefly that St. James wrote this practical and vituperative epistle. It is evident that the Christian temper was too much

overlooked by many who professed themselves followers of Christ. There were many who loved to hear the Gospel, but neglected to comply with its injunctions. In particular, they would give a very undue licence to their tongues, indulging themselves in most uncharitable censures of each other; whilst in the opinion of their own party, and in their own estimation, they stood high as “saints of the Lord.” But, in the words which we have read, the Apostle James declared plainly to them, that they “deceived their own souls,” and that “their religion was vain.”

In this declaration we may see,

I. The proper office of religion in the soul—

Religion is not intended to fill the mind with notions, but to regulate the heart and life—

1. *As admitted into the soul*, it brings us under the authority of God’s law—

[Previous to our reception of the Gospel, we know no other rule of conduct than that of our own will, or the opinions of the world around us. But when we have “received the truth as it is in Jesus,” we see that God is a Sovereign who must be obeyed; and that his law is to be a rule of action to all his creatures. His law extends not to outward actions only, but to the thoughts and desires of the heart; over which it exercises a complete controul. We now begin to see, that the requirements of that law, in their utmost extent, are all “holy, and just, and good;” precisely such as it became Jehovah to enact, and such as it is our truest happiness to obey. The mere circumstance that it has been spoken by the Lord, is quite sufficient to give it, in all cases, a paramount authority: nor are the customs or opinions of the whole world, however long or universally established, accounted of any weight in opposition to it — — —]

2. *As operating in the soul*, it disposes and qualifies us to obey that law—

[The Gospel duly received, does not merely convince the judgment, but engages the affections; and at the same time that it gives a new taste, it imparts a vital energy; whereby we are enabled to “put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” It is an engine of vast power: it is “mighty through God to

the pulling down of the strong-holds of sin and Satan : it casts down all towering imaginations, and every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God ; and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ^a.”

Now *all this is implied in the text*. It is taken for granted, that religion, duly operating, will enable us to “bridle the tongue.” But, to regulate the tongue, we must of necessity “keep and rectify the heart,” since “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh^b.” If therefore the not bridling of the tongue argues our religion to be vain, it is evident, that the proper office of religion is to bring the whole soul into subjection to God’s law, and to render us conformed to the perfect example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It will make us to aspire after this, and to strive for it, and in a considerable measure to attain it. I say, *in a considerable measure* ; because perfection, sinless perfection, is not to be attained by such corrupt and feeble creatures as we. “The wildest beasts have been so tamed as almost to have changed their nature : but the tongue can no man tame^c,” so as never in any instance to offend with it. Not even Moses, or Job, or Paul, attained such perfection as that. But still, as to any predominant habit of sin, we shall be delivered from it, if we are truly upright before God ; and shall be enabled to say with David, “I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue : I will keep my mouth with a bridle,” when most tempted and provoked to speak unadvisedly with my lips^d.]

From hence we can be at no loss to determine,

II. The state of those in whom its appropriate influence is not found—

The declaration in our text may be accounted harsh ; and particularly as made to persons who were considered as eminent in the Church of Christ. But it is true ; and must be delivered, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Mark,

1. What is here supposed—

[It is supposed that a man may seem to others to be religious, and may be fully persuaded in his own mind that he is so ; and yet have so little government of his tongue, as to prove that he deceives his own heart, and that his religion is vain. And is this a supposition that is not warranted in fact ? Would to God it were so ! but he can know very little of the Christian world, divided as it is into innumerable sects and parties,

^a 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^c Jam. iii. 7, 8.

^b Matt. xii. 34.

^d Ps. xxxix. 1.

and not know, that the most prominent in every sect have been but too ready to condemn each other, and oftentimes with an acrimony which has shewn clearly enough under whose malignant influence they were. A little difference of sentiment about certain doctrines (though not of primary or fundamental importance), or about matters of discipline only (which are confessedly less plainly revealed in the Gospel), have been sufficient, and still are, to rend the seamless garment of Christ into ten thousand pieces, and to fill with mutual enmity whole communities, who profess to have embraced a religion of love. Nor is it in this respect only that the Christian world are obnoxious to the reproof given in our text. The pride, and conceit, and vanity, of many professors proclaim to the whole world how destitute they are of true humility, and consequently of true religion. Their envious surmisings too, their uncharitable censures, their vindictive recriminations; alas! there are scarcely any persons more guilty of these things than blind bigots and party zealots, and talkative professors. Shall I mention the licence which many give to their tongue, in ungoverned anger, in palpable falsehood, in shameless impurity? Ah! tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Askelon: such are the defects of many who yet stand fair with the Christian world, and would think themselves greatly injured, if their piety were held in doubt. It is plain that such things existed in the Apostle's days; and we flatter ourselves too much, if we think that the Church is a whit purer in the present day. There ever were, and there still are, "tares growing with the wheat;" and they must be left to God, who alone can make the separation.]

2. What is here asserted—

[The religion of such persons, however eminent they may be in the estimation of themselves or others, is altogether "vain:" for it will neither be accepted of God, nor be of any avail for the salvation of their souls. God cannot accept it, because he looketh at the heart. External forms, or strong professions, cannot deceive him. "He requireth truth in the inward parts:" and forms his estimate of men by the conformity of their hearts to his mind and will. To what purpose will it be that we "cry, Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he says?" We are told by St. Paul to what a height of religion men may apparently attain, even "exercising a faith that can remove mountains, and speaking as with the tongues of angels, and giving all their goods to feed the poor, yea and their bodies also to be burnt, and yet be no better before God than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals^e." Let those who have not the

^e 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

government of the tongue attend to this. The want of that self-command argues a radical want of the vital principle of love: and the want of that principle vitiates all that we can either do or suffer, and renders it of no value in the sight of God. He has warned us beforehand, that “he will take account even of every *idle* word that we speak^f,” and much more of every uncharitable word; and that “by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned^g.”]

In reflecting on this subject, we cannot but observe,

1. In what an awful state they must be, who have not even the appearance of religion—

[I know that persons who have no desire after vital godliness will bless themselves because they are not hypocrites. But is it to the credit of any, that they do not even pretend to have the fear of God in their hearts? Is it to the credit of any, that whilst they name the name of Christ, they do not so much as profess to depart from iniquity, or to take his yoke upon them? What is this boast, but an avowed acknowledgment that they are rebels against God, violaters of his laws, haters of his Christ, and contemners of his salvation? Go ye on then, and glory that ye are not hypocrites;—though it were easy enough to prove that you are the basest hypocrites, because you profess yourselves Christians, and would be indignant with any one who should dispute your title to Christian ordinances and Christian burial, whilst you give the lie to that profession by the whole tenour of your life and conversation;—I say, go on, and glory that ye are not hypocrites. Then you shall not be condemned as hypocrites. But ye are rebels; and, as rebels, ye shall be condemned: and that Saviour whom you now despise, will shortly say, “Bring hither those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me.” Yes, verily, if those who have so much religion as to stand high in the estimation of the Christian Church on account of it, may yet deceive themselves, and have their religion vain, much more must you deceive yourselves, if you hope to escape the judgments of God in the eternal world. If their *religion* will not save them, much less will your *irreligion* save you. Repent then, and turn unto your God in sincerity and truth. Yet look not to your reformation to save you, but to the Lord Jesus Christ, who expiated your guilt by his own blood, and offers you by my mouth the forgiveness of your sins. As an ambassador from him, I beseech you in his stead,

^f Matt. xii. 36.

^g Matt. xii. 37.

be ye reconciled to God. Then shall not only your "sins be blotted out as a cloud," but your very love of sin shall be subdued and mortified by his Spirit and grace; so that the fountain which has hitherto emitted so much that was impure, shall henceforth flow in endless streams of praise to your redeeming God^h.]

2. What need the professors of religion have of vigilance and care—

[You see in others how difficult it is to have the full government of the tongue. Know then that the same difficulty exists in relation to yourselves. But in yourselves you are apt to overlook it. It is surprising how faulty a religious professor may be in the licence which he allows to his tongue, whilst he is not conscious of any fault at all, or perhaps takes credit to himself for his fidelity and zeal. But, when you hear how fatally you may deceive your own souls, it becomes you to be upon your guard, and to pray continually, with David, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lipsⁱ." And be not content with abstaining from evil discourse, but let your words be always such as may "minister grace to the hearers, and tend to the use of edifying^k." The power of speech is that which above all others may be employed for the honour of God, and the welfare of your fellow-creatures. In this respect your tongue is "your glory." Bid it then "awake to honour and adore your God^l." Remember, it is not the talkative professor of religion that is always the most humble or most acceptable in the sight of God. Many of that description there are, who "think themselves to be something, when they are nothing;" and thereby eventually deceive and ruin their own souls^m — — — Be not ye of that unhappy number. Be rather "swift to hear, and slow to speakⁿ." And, if you do stand forward to instruct and benefit others, be doubly careful to set an example of all that you inculcate, and to let the power of religion appear in the whole of your own spirit and deportment.]

^h Jam. iii. 11.

ⁱ Ps. cxli. 3.

^k Eph. iv. 29.

^l Ps. lvii. 8.

^m Gal. vi. 3. See especially Rom. ii. 18—20.

ⁿ ver. 19.

MMCCCLXII.

PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION DESCRIBED.

Jam. i. 27. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

ERRORS of the most fatal kind were early found in the Christian Church. So speedily had vital godliness decayed, that even in the Apostles' days a mere form and profession of religion was deemed sufficient. Under the idea of exalting faith, the value of good works was depreciated, and the necessity of performing them denied. Against such errors the Apostle James lifted up his voice like a trumpet: he bore testimony against them in the most energetic manner: he declared that "faith without works was dead^a:" that to be "hearers of the word and not doers of it, was the way to deceive our own souls^b:" that the "religion" which did not produce self-government, "was vain^c:" and that that religion, which alone God would acknowledge as "pure and undefiled," would lead to the most self-denying exercises of love, and to a freedom from all those corruptions with which the world abounded: "Pure religion, &c. &c."

Let us consider,

I. His description of true religion—

We must remember that the Apostle is here speaking of religion *solely* in a *practical* view. He is not speaking of principles. Not that he disregards them: on the contrary, instead of setting aside the doctrines of justification by faith, as some would represent, he insists on the necessity of faith as strongly as St. Paul himself; only he distinguishes between that which is living and operative, and that which is uninfluential and dead; and affirms, that it is the living and operative faith only, which will save the soul.

Nor is *the whole* even of practical religion in the contemplation of the Apostle in this passage. He does not advert to the exercise of our *affections towards God*, but only to our *actions towards men*: and it is in this confined view that we must understand him as speaking in the words before us.

^a Jam. ii. 20.

^b ver. 22.

^c ver. 26.

He informs us how religion will influence us in reference to,

1. The world at large—

[The terms here made use of draw the line with great accuracy. It is not required of us to renounce the world entirely: we are social beings, and have many social duties to perform: and, if we were to abandon society altogether, we should withhold from mankind many benefits which they have a right to expect from us. When God calls us “the salt of the earth,” it is necessarily implied that we are to come in contact with that mass, which, by our influence, is to be kept from corruption. But from “the corruptions that are in the world^d” we are to “keep ourselves unspotted.” Its pleasures, riches, and honours we are to despise^e, even as our Lord Jesus Christ himself did^f. Nor are we to be conformed to its sentiments and habits^g: even its friendship we are neither to court nor desire^h. If we would approve ourselves Christians indeed, we must “feel such an influence from the cross of Christ, as to be crucified unto the world, and to have the world altogether crucified unto usⁱ.” Thus, though *in* the world, we shall clearly shew that we are not *of* the world.]

2. That part of it which is destitute and afflicted—

[Love is the life and soul of religion: and, as it will extend to all in general, so will it manifest itself particularly towards those who are bowed down with affliction. The “visiting” of the afflicted is an office which the true Christian will delight to execute; yet not in a slight and transient manner: he will so interest himself in all their concerns, as to relieve and comfort them to the utmost of his power^k. His conduct towards them will resemble that of Job^l. It is the way in which he expresses his obligations to God^m; and in which he shews his love to his Lord and Saviourⁿ. He considers love and charity as a commandment stamped with peculiar authority by Christ himself^o; and, in obedience to it, he desires to “weep with them that weep, as well as to rejoice with them that rejoice^p.” This is “pure and undefiled religion.” Other things may pass for religion *before men*, but this is religion “*before God*.” it is that which he will acknowledge as agreeable to his will, and will recompense with tokens of his approbation.]

^d 2 Pet. i. 4.

^e 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^f John xvii. 14—16.

^g Rom. xii. 2.

^h Jam. iv. 4.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 14.

^k This is implied in the word ἐπισκέπτεσθαι.

^l Job xxix. 12, 13. and xxx. 25. and xxxi. 16—20.

^m Isai. lviii. 6, 7.

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 45.

^o John xiii. 34.

^p Rom. xii. 15.

This description of religion will probably force from us a tribute of applause: but, instead of bestowing on it empty commendations, it will be proper to consider,

III. The use we are to make of it—

The Apostle doubtless designed that we should regard it,

1. As a criterion whereby to judge of our state—

["Victory over the world" is one of those marks which are universally found in the Lord's people, and in no other^q. Other persons, it is true, may be free from open vices, and, through disappointments and infirmities, may become disgusted with the world: but their love of the world is not at all changed, provided they could have the things on which their hearts are fixed, with health and strength to enjoy them.

A delight in all the offices of love to men for Christ's sake is another mark, whereby Christians are distinguished from all other persons. It is a disposition which springs out of a sense of redeeming love^r, and infallibly "accompanies salvation^s." The want of this disposition argues a total absence of divine grace^t; whilst the exercise of it warrants an assured confidence in the Divine favour^u.

Let us then bring ourselves to this touchstone. Let us ask ourselves, whether we do indeed account it "better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting?" Do we consider ourselves as "pilgrims and sojourners here;" and value our possessions, not so much for the respect or comfort which they procure to ourselves, as for the opportunities they afford us of honouring God and benefiting our fellow-creatures?

Alas! alas! when estimated according to this rule, how little of "pure and undefiled religion" will be found! This is a melancholy view indeed of the Christian world; but it is the view which God himself gives us of it; and it is in vain for us to controvert it; for by his decision we must stand or fall^x.]

2. As a directory whereby to regulate our conduct—

[The commands of God relative to these things are clear and express: "Come out from the world, and be separate, 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,

^q 1 John iv. 4, 5.

^s Heb. vi. 9, 10.

^u 1 John iii. 17—19.

^r 1 John iv. 10, 11.

^t 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^x See Matt. xxv. 34—46.

saith the Lord Almighty^y." Nor is the law respecting sympathy at all less forcibly enjoined: "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^z."

In a word, I call upon you all to obey these great commands. Remember, it is not to any peculiarities of a sect that we are urging you, but to that which God himself dignifies with the name of "pure and undefiled religion."

Say not, "This is not my office: I cannot thus come out from the world, nor can I thus devote myself to deeds of charity." I readily grant that all cannot consecrate an equal measure of their time or property to these offices: but no man in the universe has any dispensation from devoting such a measure of his time and property to these things as his situation and circumstances will admit of. The command is equally obligatory on all: and a disposition to obey it ought to be equally strong in all. The various modes of our obedience will be judged of by God himself, who alone knows what our respective states and circumstances require. But this I say, "He that soweth liberally shall reap liberally; and he that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly." Respecting the excellence of such religion I dare appeal to your own consciences. See a person, whether of higher or lower rank, laying aside the cares and pleasures of the world, and visiting the abodes of misery: see the disconsolate "widow, and the helpless children," bemoaning their bereavement, whilst to the anguish occasioned by so severe a loss, the pressure of poverty is added; and, to the want of immediate sustenance, the prospect of permanent and irremediable distress: see the compassionate visitor opening the sources of consolation which the Gospel affords, till the unhappy sufferers are brought to kiss the rod that smites them: see him administering present relief, and devising means for the future support of the family: how is he received as an angel from heaven! And how does "the widow's heart even sing with joy," whilst she acknowledges the hand of God in these succours, and, with feelings too big for utterance, adores her Heavenly Benefactor! Go ye, beloved, to such scenes as these, and ye will soon begin to see the beauty of religion, and to understand that paradox, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yea, realize one such scene as this, and ye will need no further persuasion to assist the charity before us, or to emulate the zeal of those who are most active in it^a.]

^y 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

^z Gal. vi. 2.

^a The particular Institution may here be more fully opened, and be further recommended by either local, or general, considerations.

MMCCCLXIII.

GOD'S DISTINGUISHED REGARD FOR THE POOR.

Jam. ii. 5. *Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*

IT is a duty incumbent on all ministers to discountenance any errors, whether of faith or practice, that may have crept into the Church. But when compelled by necessity to reprove what is amiss, they should shew by most unquestionable evidence, that there is just occasion for censure; and, by their tender manner of reproving, they should evince that they are actuated only by a sense of duty to God, and of love to man. St. James had seen a very shameful partiality prevailing in the Church in favour of the rich, while the poor were too generally neglected and despised. Against this great evil he bears his testimony, not merely with fidelity, but with unoffending tenderness, and unanswerable wisdom. His argument is to this effect; Hath not God *chosen* the poor, and selected them as monuments of his love, and as heirs of his glory? With what consistency then can you pour contempt upon them, as though they were unworthy of the smallest attention?

In discoursing upon his words we shall shew,

I. What inheritance God has chosen for the poor—

While man is unmindful of the poor, God has exalted them above others in respect of,

1. Their present portion—

[Faith is that precious gift which he has bestowed on them: and though few among the rich regret their want of it, yet is it a most inestimable blessing. The smallest portion of it is sufficient (provided it be a true and living faith) to prove their election of God^a; to secure to them the remission of sins^b; to bring peace into their conscience^c; and to sanctify

^a Acts xiii. 48.

^b Acts x. 43.

^c Rom. v. 1.

their hearts^d. The smallest portion of it is a *peculiar* gift bestowed on very few^e; and one which neither men nor devils ever shall deprive them of^f. Yet God has not chosen them to enjoy a *small* portion of it, but “to be *rich* in it:” he would have them “strong in faith, not staggering at any promise^g,” but “living,” both for temporal and spiritual things, altogether “by faith in the Son of God^h,” fully assured, that all things needful shall be supplied for their bodiesⁱ, and that all things shall work together for the good of their souls^k.

The Levites were not suffered to have any inheritance among their brethren; but the Lord their God was their inheritance^l. And this, so far from being a grievance to them, was deemed their highest privilege. Thus privileged are the poor: they have little of this world; but, if they have God for their portion, they are the richest people upon earth.]

2. Their eternal inheritance—

[God has provided “a kingdom for them that love him;” a kingdom worthy to be possessed by those, whom God delights to honour. And it is his will that “the poor of this world” should not only aspire after it, but consider themselves as “heirs” to it. While they are destitute, perhaps, of food to eat, or of raiment to put on, he would have them like minors that are heirs to a large estate, who delight to survey the grounds which they are speedily to possess: he would have them survey all the glory of heaven, and say, “*That* is my patrimony: the instant I attain the age appointed by my Father’s will, I shall have a host of angels sent to bear me on their wings to the mansions prepared for me.”]

To vindicate the ways of God, we shall proceed to shew,

II. Why he has chosen this portion for them in particular—

That God has chosen this portion for the poor is beyond a doubt—

[If the Apostle had only affirmed it, no room would have been left for doubt; but he ventured to appeal even to the rich themselves respecting it, and *that* too at the very time that he was reproofing them for their contempt of the poor; yea, he even grounded the reproof itself upon that very appeal. He could not possibly express more strongly his own persuasion

^d Acts xv. 9.

^e Isai. liii. 1. John xii. 38. Rom. x. 16.

^f John iv. 14.

^g Rom. iv. 20.

^h Gal. ii. 20.

ⁱ Matt. vi. 33.

^k Rom. viii. 28.

^l Numb. xviii. 20. Josh. xiii. 33.

of the truth in question. But it is capable of abundant proof both *from Scripture and experience*. Who were the people that received the testimony of our blessed Lord? "Did any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believe on him^m?" Who constituted the great majority of the Church in the apostolic age? St. Paul informs us; "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the *foolish*, the *weak*, the *base*, the *despised*, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that areⁿ." And we might appeal to you at this day; Who are they that crowd the churches where the Gospel is preached, notwithstanding they meet with the same contemptuous treatment that the Apostle so justly complains of^o? Who are they that "receive the word with meekness, and have it engrafted" in their hearts, and exemplified in their lives? are these the rich? A few there may be; but it is "to the poor chiefly that the Gospel is preached^p," and it is "the common people that hear it gladly^q."]

Nor are we at a loss to assign reasons for this procedure—

[God has thus distinguished the poor, in order *to stain the pride of man*. Men, if they are exalted above their fellow-creatures in wealth or dignity, are ready to conceive that they are as great in the eyes of God as they are in their own eyes. They think themselves (I had almost said) above God himself: they are too wise to learn of God, and too great to be controlled by him. God therefore pours contempt on them, as they do on him^r. He will let them see that their possessions or endowments, however great, are not a child's portion, but only as crumbs cast to the dogs. He will render the poor as superior to them in spiritual things, as they are to the poor in temporal things: he will "lift up the beggar from the dung-hill, and set him among the princes^s," while he casts down the mighty from their thrones to the lowest abyss of shame and misery.

Moreover, in thus distinguishing the poor, God further

^m John vii. 48.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^o How many will open their pews to a rich or well-dressed person, that would suffer a poor man, however pious or infirm, to "*stand*" during the whole service, without ever offering him a seat, when they had room enough to accommodate many! Yea, how many rich persons will absent themselves from the ordinances, and *lock up* their pews, to prevent their being occupied! What would St. James have said to these things? See ver. 2—4, 9.

^p Matt. xi. 5.

^q Mark xii. 37.

^r 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^s 1 Sam. ii. 8.

designs to magnify the riches of his own grace. If God bestowed his favours principally on the rich, we should be ready to think that they had some peculiar claim upon him, and that his attention to them was no more than their due: or perhaps we should rather conclude, that their superior talents enabled them to unravel the divine mysteries, and to attain heaven by their own unassisted efforts. But when we see the Gospel "hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes[†]," we are constrained to acknowledge the marvellous condescension, and uncontrollable sovereignty, of our God.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who despise the portion that God has chosen—

[It is to be lamented that many even among the poor themselves are regardless of the "true riches^u." But what madness is it to reject that which would assuage all their present sorrows; and to render themselves infinitely more destitute in the next world than they are in this! O that they would accept the portion that God offers them!

The rich too almost universally despise the Gospel. But how painful will their reflections be in that day when the parable of Dives and Lazarus shall be realized in them! O consider, ye are not excluded; God is willing to bestow the same inestimable blessings upon you. Seek then to be rich in faith, and heaven itself shall be your everlasting inheritance.]

2. Those who desire to possess that portion—

[Blessed be God, there are some among the poor that know and enjoy their privileges. But whence is it that *they* discern what is hid from others? Had they any thing in themselves more than others; "any thing which they have not received?" No^x: they would never have chosen God, if God had not first "chosen" them^y. Let them then adore that grace which has been thus magnified towards them.

Do any of the rich inquire, What shall *we* do to get a share in this inheritance? Shall we cast away all our riches, and reduce ourselves to poverty? No; there is an infinitely better and safer way; "LOVE GOD." You may give away all your goods, and be nothing profited^z: but if you "love God, the kingdom is absolutely *promised* to you." The poor cannot be saved unless they be rich in faith: and you, if you exercise faith and love towards our adorable Saviour, shall also be saved with an everlasting salvation.]

[†] Matt. xi. 25.

^u 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^x 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^y John xv. 16.

^z 1 Cor. xiii. 3. *Thrice* is this *expressly* repeated in that fore-cited passage, 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

MMCCCLXIV.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY.

Jam. ii. 12. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*

THE law of works contained in the Ten Commandments is continued in force under the Gospel dispensation, *as a rule of life*. This appears from the frequent reference which is made to it in the New Testament *in this particular view*. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, when inculcating the duty of love, says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled *the law* . . . for love is the fulfilling of *the law*^a." In like manner St. James, condemning an undue respect of persons which had obtained to a great extent in the Christian Church, says, "If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of *the law* as transgressors^b." The difference which exists between the Law and the Gospel, is not that the Gospel dispenses with any thing which the law had enjoined, but that it requires the same things *in a different manner*; the law inculcating them as the means of obtaining life; the Gospel requiring them as the means of honouring God, and of manifesting that life which God has already imparted to the soul. The law in its requirements begets a spirit of *bondage*: but the Gospel, whilst its requirements are the same, operates as "a law of *liberty*;" inspiring us with motives of a more ingenuous kind, and at the same time imparting to the believer such powerful assistance as renders obedience easy and delightful. Hence the Apostle, shewing that the conduct which he was reproofing was condemned by the Gospel no less than by the law, (for the Gospel itself declares, that "he shall have judgment without mercy, who has shewn no mercy^c,") entreats the whole Christian Church

^a Rom. xiii. 8—10.

^b ver. 9.

^c ver. 13.

“so to speak, and so to act, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”

Now in these words we see,

I. The true character of the Gospel—

It is a law, and has all the force of a law, and must be obeyed on pain of God's heavy displeasure; but it is “a law of liberty:” and this it is,

1. As freeing men from *the guilt* of sin—

[The Gospel proclaims, to all who receive it, pardon and peace. It holds forth a Saviour, who has bought us with his blood, and by the sacrifice of himself has effected our reconciliation with the offended Majesty of heaven. It declares, that “by receiving that Saviour,” however guilty we may have been in times past, “we shall have the privilege of becoming the sons of God^d” — — — In this it differs widely from the law: the law knew nothing of pardon: it simply said, “Do this, and live:” and if in one single instance it was violated, all hopes of acceptance by it were destroyed for ever^e. A certain kind of forgiveness indeed was obtained by the offering of certain sacrifices: but it was only such a measure of it as exempted the person from present punishment, but could never procure acceptance for him in the eternal world; and hence, as “it could never really take away sins,” it could “never make any man perfect as pertaining to the conscience^f.” Moreover, there were some sins for which no sacrifice whatever could be received. But the Gospel offers a *full* and *everlasting* remission from *all* sins, and declares, that “all who believe, are justified from all things, even from those from which they could never (even in appearance) be justified by the law of Moses^g.” Thus by announcing to the whole world, that “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus^h,” the Gospel may justly be called “A law of liberty.”]

2. As freeing men from the power of sin—

[The promise which the Gospel makes to all who truly receive it, is this; “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under graceⁱ.” And, whilst it gives this assurance to its votaries, it imparts to them the power of carrying it into effect. The person who is united unto Christ by faith, is like a scion, which when engrafted into a

^d John i. 12.

^e Compare ver. 10. with Gal. iii. 10.

^f Heb. ix. 9. and x. 1—4.

^g Acts xiii. 39.

^h Rom. viii. 1.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 14.

tree, lives by virtue derived from the tree, and is enabled from that time to bring forth its appropriate fruits. Our Lord in this view says, "I am the vine; ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me, or separate from me, ye can do nothing^k." In this again the Gospel differs widely from the law: for, whilst the law issued its commands, it imparted no power to obey them: but the Gospel conveys to the soul of the believer such a measure of strength, as enables it to mortify sin, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. This is what St. Paul expressly tells us: "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that is, the Gospel, (which St. James in nearly similar terms calls 'the law of liberty,')* hath made me free from the law of sin and death: 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, and for sin, (hath done; that is, he hath) condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit^l."

I may add, that the Gospel gives us a more liberal spirit, in that it does not force us to do what is hateful to us, but disposes us willingly to take upon us the yoke of Christ, and renders "his yoke easy, and his burthen light." The current of a believer's affections is changed by it^m; so that, though he still feels the workings of corruption strong within him, he "delights in the law of God after his inward manⁿ," and "has his conversation in heaven," as the unbeliever has on earth^o.

Thus does "the law of faith^p" "make men free^q;" and "the liberty which they receive from Christ renders them free indeed^r."]

The Apostle, in calling men's attention to the law of liberty, marks,

II. Our duty in relation to it—

If we have been made free by the Gospel, we are bound to regard it,

1. As *our rule of conduct here*—

[The substance of all its commands is comprehended in one word, Love. As he that loveth fulfils the law, so he that loveth fulfils the Gospel also; as St. Paul has said; "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^s." But here we must particularly observe, that our obedience to

^k John xv. 1, 5.

ⁿ Rom. vii. 22.

^q John viii. 32.

^l Rom. viii. 2—4.

^o Phil. iii. 19, 20.

^r John viii. 36.

^m Col. iii. 2.

^p Rom. iii. 27.

^s Gal. vi. 2.

this law is not restricted to overt acts: our whole spirit must accord with it, and be moulded by it. If we notice the particular conduct which the Apostle reproveth, we shall find, that it was not such as would have brought down censure from the world at large: it would rather have been commended as a respect due to the higher orders of society. But, when strictly examined, it was contrary to the principle of love: and that was quite sufficient to render it an object of severest reprobation. The doing as we would be done unto, forms the proper standard for our conduct towards all mankind: and if, either in word or deed, we deviate from that, we transgress that holy law which we are bound to obey. How far this heavenly principle extends, may be seen in the description given of it by St. Paul: and, if we do not in the constant habit of our minds endeavour to attain it, we may believe what we will, and do what we will, and suffer what we may, but, after all, we shall be only “as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals[†].”]

2. As *God's* rule of judgment hereafter—

[By this law we shall be judged in the last day. It is remarkable, that in the account which our Lord gives us of the final judgment, there is no mention made of any actual transgression as determining the fate of the ungodly: their performance of the offices of love is the only subject of inquiry; and their neglect of them is the only ground that is specified for their eternal condemnation^u. Of course, I must not be understood to say, that this will really be the *only* subject of inquiry, or the *only* ground of a sinner's condemnation; for no doubt the whole of men's lives will be taken into the account in fixing their eternal destiny: but it is the only thing mentioned by our Lord in his account of that day: and this is sufficient to shew us the vast importance of keeping it ever in our view. We must attend to it no less in our *words*, than in our *actions*; and “so *speak*, and so *do*, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”]

That we may bring home this subject more powerfully to your hearts, we would entreat you to bear in mind the main points contained in it:

REMEMBER—

1. The true nature of the Gospel—

[Men universally conceive of the Gospel as a *system of restraints*: and when we call upon them to obey the Gospel, they consider us as attempting to abridge their liberty. But the very reverse of this is true. We find men slaves to the

[†] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—7.

^u Matt. xxv. 34—46.

world, and sin, and Satan; and we come to break their chains, and to set them at liberty. Our blessed Lord proclaimed this as the great object of his mission, "to preach deliverance to the captives, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord^x." There are now, as there were in the Jewish state, many who love their bonds, and account the service of their master preferable to the liberty that is proclaimed. But this does not at all change the nature of the Gospel, which is altogether "a law of liberty" to all who truly embrace it. Do not then imagine, that, when we would induce you to renounce all the lords that have had dominion over you, we would bring you into bondage, or deprive you of any thing that will conduce to your real happiness. We make our appeal to yourselves, and ask, Whether what you have hitherto considered as liberty, has not been in reality the sorest bondage? We ask, Whether sin has not kept you from the love and service of God, and bound you as with adamant chains to the objects of time and sense? We ask, Whether in proportion as you were brought to the employment and felicity of the heavenly hosts, you would not attain to perfect freedom? To all then we say, Believe in Christ, and give yourselves up to him, and ye shall then "be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God^y."]]

2. Its proper tendency—

[Strange as the inconsistency is, the very persons who will exclaim against the Gospel as making the way to heaven so strait that nobody can walk in it, will cry out against it also as a licentious doctrine, and will represent the preachers of it as saying, that men may live as they please, provided only they believe. But the Gospel is "a doctrine according to godliness;" and the very "grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." The Gospel, it is true, is "a law of liberty;" but not of liberty *to live in sin*: it is a liberty *from sin*; and a liberty *in the ways of God*. Instead of superseding morality, it raises the tone of morals to the highest possible pitch, requiring us to "walk in all things as Christ walked," and to "purify ourselves even as he is pure." And, whilst it sets up this high standard for our attainment, it sets up the same for our trial in the last day; and requires us so to speak and so to do, as they that shall be tried and judged by it. Know therefore, that notwithstanding the Gospel is as free for all as the light we see and the air we breathe, its proper tendency is to assimilate us to God, whose name and nature is LOVE^z.]

^x Luke iv. 18, 19. ^y Rom. viii. 21. ^z 1 John iv. 8, 16.

3. The wisdom of all who profess to have embraced it—

[Doubtless it is your privilege to be rejoicing in God your Saviour, and in the freeness and fulness of his salvation — — — But you must also keep in view the future judgment, and be acting continually with a reference to it. There is no dispensation given to you to continue in sin: “Shall you continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” The scrutiny which you shall undergo in the last day, so far from being less exact than that of others, will be more strict, in proportion to the advantages you have enjoyed, and the professions you have made^a. Your acceptance, it is true, will be solely on account of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for you: but the truth of your faith will be tried by the works it has produced: and according to the measure and quality of them will be your reward. I say then, in all that you say and do, have respect to the future judgment, when “God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:” and in order to your being approved of God in that day, “walk in love, as Christ has loved you^b;” and, whilst you endeavour to “walk in his *steps*,” “let the same *mind* also be in you as was in Christ Jesus^c.”]

^a 1 Pet. iv. 17.

^b Eph. v. 2.

^c Phil. ii. 5.

MMCCCLXV.

JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS EXPLAINED.

Jam. ii. 24. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

CERTAINLY, of all the questions that can occupy the human mind, the first and greatest is, “How shall man be just before God^a?” On this subject men have differed from each other as far as the east is from the west. To this difference the passage before us has not a little contributed. It is therefore most desirable that we enter candidly into the investigation of it, and endeavour to ascertain with all possible precision what is so indispensable to our eternal welfare.

^a Job ix. 2.

It is obvious, that the words which I have read to you are a deduction from a preceding argument. We ought therefore carefully to examine the argument itself; for, it is only by a thorough knowledge of the premises that we can understand the conclusion drawn from them. Suppose that I were, as a conclusion of an argument, to say, ‘ So then man is an immortal being ;’ if the argument itself were not investigated, you might understand it as a denial of man’s mortality: but, if the argument shewed, that the conclusion referred to his soul alone, the conclusion would be found perfectly consistent with an apparently opposite position, namely, that man is a mortal being. In like manner, if the Apostle’s argument in the preceding context be candidly examined, there will be found no real inconsistency between the deduction contained in the text, and an apparently opposite deduction which may be founded on premises altogether different.

Let us consider then,

I. The Apostle’s argument—

The first thing to be inquired is, Whence the argument arose? or, *What was the occasion of it?*

[St. James was reproofing an evil which obtained to a very great extent among the Church in his day; namely, the shewing partiality to the richer members, whilst the poorer were treated with supercilious contempt, and harassed with the most flagrant acts of oppression^b. Now, as this was directly contrary to the whole spirit of Christianity, he introduced his reproof with these words; “ My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons^c.” NOW THESE WORDS, DULY NOTICED, WILL GIVE A CLUE TO THE WHOLE. “ Have not *the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ* with respect of persons:” HOLD NOT THE TRUE FAITH IN SO ERRONEOUS AND UNWORTHY A MANNER. He then proceeds to shew, that a faith productive of no better conduct than that, will never justify, “ never *save*,” the soul^d: for that it is a dead faith, and not a living one, a mere carcass, and not a living body^e.]

The next thing we have to do is, to *trace the steps of his argument*—

^b ver. 2—6.

^c ver. 1.

^d ver. 14.

^e ver. 26.

[Having reproved the partiality before-mentioned, he shews, that it is alike contrary both to the law and to the Gospel: to the law, the very essence of which is love; (which if any person habitually violates, he violates the whole law^f;) and to the Gospel, which inspires its votaries with a more liberal spirit^g, and declares, that the person who exercises not mercy to his brethren, of whatever class they may be, shall find no mercy at the hands of God^h.

He then *appeals* to the whole Church; and calls upon them to say, whether any person *so holding the faith of Christ* can be saved? and whether all the faith whereon he builds his confidence, be not a nullity, and a delusion? “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works? can faith, *such a faith as that*, save himⁱ?”

He then proceeds to shew how vain any man's pretences to *love* would be, if it were as inoperative as this faith. “If a brother or sister be naked, and be destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and be ye filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit^k?” Could that person be said to possess any *real love*? or would such a love as that be approved and rewarded by God? Certainly not. “Even so then,” says he, “*faith*, if it have not works, is dead, being alone^l,” and any person before whom you might boast of such a faith as that, might justly reply, “Shew me thy faith without thy works, (which you can never do:) and I will shew thee my faith by my works^m,” which is the only test to which such pretensions can be referred. Nay more, such a faith as that is no better than the faith of devils. “The devils believe that there is one God: and *they tremble*,” but *they do not love*. So you may believe that Jesus Christ is a Saviour; and *you may be partially affected by that persuasion*: but, *if you do not love*, your faith is no better than theirs: and, by pretending to a living and saving faith, when you have nothing but a dead and inoperative faith, you only shew, that you are a “vain,” ignorant, and self-deluded “manⁿ.”

He now goes on to confirm these assertions by an appeal to the Scriptures themselves. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect^o?” Abraham believed in the promised Seed, “in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” But what kind of a faith was his? Was it unproductive of holy obedience? No: it led him to obey the

^f ver. 8—11.

ⁱ ver. 14.

^m ver. 18.

^g ver. 12.

^k ver. 15, 16.

ⁿ ver. 19, 20.

^h ver. 13.

^l ver. 17.

^o ver. 21, 22.

hardest command that was ever given to mortal man, even to slay, and to reduce to ashes upon the altar, that very son, to whom the promises were made, and through whom alone they could ever be accomplished: so that *his works* evinced the truth and sincerity of his faith; and *proved indisputably, that he was accepted of his God*. His faith existed before: but now it operated; and “was made perfect by the works which it produced;” just as a tree is then only in a state of complete perfection, when it is laden with its proper fruits. The fruit indeed does not add to the vegetative power that produced it; but it evinces that power, and displays it in full perfection: and so did Abraham’s works evince the truth of the faith which previously existed in him, and complete the objects for which it had been bestowed. “And then was fulfilled the Scripture which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called, The friend of God^p.” The same he illustrates by another instance from Scripture, even that of Rahab, who evinced the truth of her faith, and was accepted in the exercise of it, when at the peril of her life she concealed the Jewish spies, and sent them home in safety to their own camp^q.

Now from all this he draws, as an unquestionable deduction, that very truth, which in the first instance he had only asserted; namely, that persons, whatever degrees of faith they might pretend to, could never be accepted of God, unless their faith wrought by love: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only:” for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also^r.]

Thus viewed, the argument is clear from beginning to end. That the terms which are used are strong, is certain: but then they may be accounted for from the general drift of the argument, and its immense importance to the Church of God. The Apostles do not measure words and syllables as we are apt to do, but speak in broad unqualified terms. St. Paul had done so on the subject of a sinner’s acceptance by faith alone: and St. James does so on the subject of those vain pretences to faith which were made by many who were destitute of good works: but an attention to the scope of their respective arguments will lead us to a just view, both of the terms which

^p ver. 23.

^q ver. 25.

^r ver. 24, 26. If ver. 25. were put into a parenthesis, the connexion between ver. 24 and ver. 26 would more plainly appear, and the argument stand more full and complete.

they use, and of the conclusions at which they arrive. St. James's argument we have seen. Let us now attend to,

II. The conclusion drawn from it—

This must accord with the argument on which it is founded. If we make the premises refer to one thing, and the conclusion to another, or, if we make the conclusion broader than the premises, we destroy the argument altogether, and make the Apostle reason, not only as if he were not inspired, but as if he were not endowed with common sense. What then does his conclusion amount to? it amounts to this:

1. That the future judgment will proceed on grounds of perfect equity—

[God could, if it pleased him, assign to every man his portion in the eternal world, according to what he has seen existing in the heart. But it is his intention to shew before the whole universe, that, as the governor and the judge of all, he dispenses rewards and punishments on grounds which are not arbitrary, but strictly equitable. On this account the day of judgment is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God^s." If the judgment were passed on men solely on grounds which none but God could see, it would be impossible for any one to judge of the equity of his proceedings: but when the works of all are brought forth as witnesses of the inward dispositions and habits of their minds, all can see the correctness of the estimate which is formed of men's characters, and the justice of the sentence that is passed upon them. This then is one part of the conclusion which the Apostle arrives at in the words before us: God will not judge of men by their faith, which he alone can discern, but by their works, which all may judge of as soon as ever they are laid before them. A man may pretend to faith of the strongest kind: but the inquiry will be, what effects did it produce? And, if the fruits which it produced were such as were insufficient to attest its genuine truth and excellence, they will be utterly disregarded; and God will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity^t." However confidently the truth and genuineness of it may be asserted by the persons themselves, God will not at all regard it, but will bring every thing to the test which is here established, and condemn or justify every man according to his works^u.]

^s Rom. ii. 5.

^t Matt. vii. 21—23.

^u Matt. xii. 36, 37.

2. That faith, of whatever kind it be, is of no value, any farther than it is attested by works—

[If faith in the first instance apprehends Christ as a Saviour from guilt and condemnation, it does not rest there: it lays hold on him for sanctification, as well as for righteousness^x; and would account him not worthy of the name of Jesus, if he did not save his people from their sins^y. The characters given to faith in the inspired volume are inseparable from it: it works by love^z, and overcomes the world^a, and purifies the heart^b: and if it produce not these effects, it will never benefit the soul. Knowing therefore in what way God will appreciate it hereafter, it becomes us to form a correct estimate of it now; and to weigh ourselves in the balance of the sanctuary now, that we may not be found wanting in the day of judgment.]

It will here be expected, of course, that we answer a common OBJECTION to the foregoing statement—

[It is said that St. Paul's sentiments and declarations on this subject are directly opposed to those of St. James; since, after a long argument, he comes to this conclusion: "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law^c." He goes farther still, and says, that "to him that *worketh not*, but believeth in him that *justifieth the ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousness^d." Now it may well be asked, 'How can this be reconciled with the foregoing statement?' I answer, 'Only examine St. Paul's argument, as you have that of St. James, and you will see that there is no opposition at all between their respective assertions.' The two Apostles are writing on two different subjects. St. Paul is proving that a man is not to seek salvation by any righteousness of his own, but simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: whereas St. James is proving, that the man who professes to have faith in Christ, must shew forth his faith by his works. St. Paul endeavours to convince the self-justiciary; St. James, the Antinomian;—St. Paul, by shewing, that works are nothing without faith; St. James, by shewing, that faith is nothing without works. St. Paul exalts Christ, as giving a title to heaven; St. James, as giving a meetness for heaven. St. Paul bends the whole force of his mind to establish the one leading doctrine of the Gospel; St. James, to have that doctrine adorned. Thus, according to the two Apostles, a man is justified *by faith*, because *by it* he is made righteous; and he

^x 1 Cor. i. 30.

^y Matt. i. 21.

^z Gal. v. 6.

^a 1 John v. 4.

^b Acts xv. 9

^c Rom. iii. 28.

^d Rom. iv. 5.

is justified *by works*, because *by them* he *is proved* righteous : and God in justifying him, whether on the one ground, or the other, approves himself both “ a just God and a Saviour.” We may render this matter somewhat more clear by means of a familiar illustration. A scion must be engrafted into a stock in order that it may live : and it must bring forth fruit in order to prove that it does live. Is there any opposition between these two assertions? None whatever. So then with Paul I assert, that man must be engrafted into Christ by faith, in order that he may live : and with St. James I assert, that he must bring forth fruits of righteousness, to prove that he does live. Without being engrafted into the stock, he can have no life : and, if he bring not forth good works, he shews that he has no life. These two positions are perfectly compatible with each other : and so, when properly understood, are the apparently opposite positions of these two Apostles.]

Hoping now that I have set the whole of this matter in a clear light, I CONCLUDE with a few words,

1. Of caution—

[Two things in particular I would caution you against : first, *Do not separate faith and works* ; and next, *Do not confound them*.

Do not separate them, or imagine that you can be saved by either of them apart from the other : for faith, if it be alone, is dead ; and works, if they be alone, leave you altogether destitute of any interest in Christ. If your faith be strong enough to remove mountains, yet, if it work not by love, it will leave you no better than “ sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals.” And if your works be ever so perfect, they can never exceed what the law requires of you ; and consequently, can never discharge the debt which you owe to God for your past violations of it : nor indeed can you ever in your present imperfect state fulfil the law so perfectly as not to come short of it every day you live : and consequently, every day you live, you stand in need of mercy for your daily transgressions, instead of purchasing heaven by your superabounding merits.

On the other hand, *Do not confound the two*, as though you were to be saved by faith and works united ; or to have a first justification by faith, and a second justification by works. Either the one or the other of these errors will invalidate the whole Gospel ; and will rob Christ of his glory, and you of your salvation. Christ is the only Saviour of sinful man : and his righteousness is that in which alone any child of man can be accepted before God. If you join any thing with that, you make it void : and, as far as respects you, “ Christ will have

died in vain^e." The true way of salvation is this: go to Christ as a sinner: and seek salvation altogether through his atoning sacrifice, and his obedience unto death. But, when you have believed in him, be careful to "maintain good works," yea, and to "excel in" good works^f. Then will Christ be honoured in every way: your faith will honour him as the alone Saviour of mankind; and your works will honour him as your Lord and Master. But remember to keep each in its place. In building an edifice, you do not build the superstructure first, (if I may so speak,) and then lay the foundation afterwards; nor do you mingle the foundation and superstructure in one indiscriminate mass: but you keep each in its place; and then it answers the end for which it was raised. So you must lay Christ as your foundation first; and afterwards raise on him the superstructure of good works: then shall you be found "workmen that need not be ashamed;" and both in your faith and in your works be justified before God.]

2. Of encouragement—

[Let not any apparent difficulties in this subject embarrass you. They will all vanish in an instant, if only you get a broken and contrite heart. It is surprising what light such a state of mind will reflect on the subject before us. It may not indeed enable you to solve all the *verbal* difficulties that may be raised: but, as far as relates to the main subject, it will scatter all doubts, as mist is scattered by the noon-day sun. It will convince you that no righteousness but that of Christ can ever avail for your acceptance before God: and, at the same time, that holiness is no less necessary for your final enjoyment of his favour. It will convince you too, that both faith and holiness, being the gifts of God, you have no reason to despair of attaining all that is necessary to your complete salvation; since God is pledged "not to despise the contrite heart," or to withhold from his upright people the blessings either of grace or glory^g.]

^e Gal. v. 2, 4. ^f Tit. iii. 8. *πρωτόσταθαι*. ^g Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

MMCCCLXVI.

THE BEST OF MEN BUT WEAK AND FRAIL.

Jam. iii. 2. *In many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.*

THAT persons instructed in divine truth should be anxious to instruct others is well: but to rush

uncalled into the ostensible office of the ministry, is by no means expedient. By his life, as well as by his doctrine, must a minister instruct his people : and if, on the one hand, his reward will be glorious if he discharge his duties aright ; his punishment will, on the other hand, be proportionably severe, if by word or deed he “ cast a stumbling-block before others,” and “ cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of.” Before a man therefore engage in this arduous calling, he should see his way clear : lest, by entering rashly upon it, he involve himself in the heavier condemnation. This is the hint given by St. James, in the verse before my text : and, to enforce it, he reminds us of our extreme frailty ; since “ in many things we all offend,” and have therefore abundant reason for caution in contracting, without necessity, such an augmented responsibility.

Let me, then, shew you,

I. What even good men have to mourn over, in their daily walk before God—

“ There is no man that liveth, and sinneth not.” By reason of our extreme weakness, and the numberless obstacles which lie in our way, there is not any man who does not occasionally “ make a trip,” and “ offend,”

I. By a slip of *his feet*—

[No good man will, knowingly and deliberately, do that which is evil. “ A man truly born of God cannot *so* commit sin.” He has a principle within him which will not suffer it. But, *sometimes through ignorance and inadvertence*, and *sometimes through weakness and corruption*, the very best of men may err : as it is said, “ The righteous falleth seven times.” When James and John proposed to call fire from heaven, to consume a Samaritan village, it was doubtless from a mistaken idea, that the example of Elijah, who so vindicated the honour of Jehovah, was applicable to the occasion which then presented itself to them ; and that such was a proper way of expressing their indignation against those who had refused to their Master the rights of hospitality. It was also from a mistaken love to his Divine Master that Peter dissuaded Jesus from subjecting himself to the sufferings which he had just predicted. But the principle, in both these instances, was

really evil, though the Apostles themselves thought it to be good: and therefore they brought on themselves a just rebuke. In Peter's requiring the Gentiles to submit to the Jewish law, there was downright "dissimulation;" such as betrayed Barnabas also into the very same fault. Here was weakness; here was the sad effect of human corruption: and, accordingly, it was reprov'd with a severity proportioned to the offence. In Paul and Barnabas too, there was a blameworthy contention, issuing in their final separation. The error of Peter and Barnabas proceeded from an *undue compliance*; and that of Paul and Barnabas from an *undue pertinacity*, both in sentiment and determination. But, as such things have been in the Church, even amongst the Apostles themselves; so must they be expected to arise, whilst human nature is so weak, and so many difficulties beset our way — — —]

2. By a slip of *his tongue*—

[“If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” The fact is, that every corruption of the heart finds its first and readiest gratification through the tongue. If pride or vanity inflate the mind, it will discover itself, not only in the look and gesture, but through some appropriate language of the lips. If levity have put a man off his guard, it will betray itself by some unadvised expressions, some “jestings” (facetious terms of double import), which may excite a smile at the moment, but are quite offensive to God. Need I say how anger will vent itself, or how uncharitableness will indulge its malignant propensities? But so it is with every unhallowed feeling of the soul: and he is the most perfect man who puts the most complete restraint upon his tongue, and suffers it not to utter any thing which God will not approve.]

Whilst good men have so much occasion to mourn, let us consider,

II. What they have more especially to attend to, in order to counteract the evil of their hearts—

Amongst the many things which might be mentioned, I will recommend,

1. Humiliation—

[Who has not found, by sad experience, the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that “in many things we all offend?” Who then has not reason to lie low both before God and man? If Paul complained of “the law in his members warring against the law of his mind,” much more may we; and with him cry out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?”

Methinks, if Job abhorred himself, and the Prophet Isaiah complained, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips," a leper in the midst of a leprous population; no humiliation can be too deep for us. Let us walk softly then, every one of us, in the remembrance of our manifold infirmities; and abase ourselves before God, as "less than the least of all saints," yea, "as the very chief of sinners."]

2. Watchfulness—

[Never can we tell what an hour may bring forth; or what temptations may arise, to cause us to offend either in word or deed. We should therefore "make a covenant with our eyes," as holy Job did; and "set a watch before the door of our lips," as did the man after God's own heart. We should mark the first risings of inclination, that they may not operate with undue force, and betray us into actual sin. We should mark with jealous care the motives and principles by which we are actuated; remembering, that by them will the quality of our actions be determined, and that by them we shall be judged in the last day. In a word, we must "keep our hearts with all diligence, knowing that out of them are the issues of life."]

3. Dependence upon God—

[Here is our only security. If we trust in our own hearts, our folly will very soon appear. Satan can "assume the form of an angel of light," and deceive us by specious appearances: and, if we would be preserved from his wiles, our prayer should continually be to God; "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not:" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Then, notwithstanding our weakness and frailty, we may hope to be "preserved blameless till the day of Christ."

"Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, for ever and ever! Amen."

MMCCCLXVII.

THE EVILS OF THE TONGUE.

Jam. iii. 6. *The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

AMONGST the most important of all subjects must be reckoned the government of the tongue. The consideration of it is well calculated to convince the profane, to pluck off the mask from hypocrites, to humble the sincere, and to edify every description of persons. St. James, who intended his epistle as a corrective to the abuses that prevailed in the Christian Church, insisted strongly upon this subject: and, in the words before us, has given us such a description of the tongue, as, if it had proceeded from any other than an inspired writer, would have been deemed a libel upon human nature. In order that the text may be fully understood, we shall shew,

I. The true character of the human tongue—

The Apostle tells us “it is a fire”—

[Fire, in its original formation, was intended for the good of man; and, when subordinated to his wishes, is highly beneficial: but its tendency is to consume and to destroy. Thus the tongue was at first made for the Creator's praise; but through the introduction of sin, that member, which was, and, if well used, yet is, the glory of man^a, is become “an instrument of unrighteousness” and all iniquity.

Fire also, even the smallest spark, is capable of producing incalculable mischief; such mischief as it may not be in the power of man to repair. Thus also will one single motion of the tongue^b. It may so irritate and inflame a man, as to change him instantly into a savage beast, or an incarnate devil: and, if the whole world should labour to remedy the evil, it would mock their endeavours.]

He further adds that it is “a world of iniquity”—

[There is not any sin whatever, which does not stand in the nearest connexion with the tongue, and employ it in its service. Search the long catalogue of sins against God; then inspect those against our neighbour; and, lastly, those against ourselves; and there will not be found one, no, not one, that has not the tongue as its principal ally^c — — — All iniquities whatsoever centre in it, and are fulfilled by it: so justly is it called, “A *world* of iniquity.”]

Its character will yet further appear by considering,

^a Ps. lvii. 8.

^b ver. 3, 4.

^c See Rom. iii. 13, 14.

II. Its effects—

1. These are defiling—

[Sin, as soon as ever it is conceived in the heart, defiles the soul: but when it is uttered by the lips, “it defileth the whole body.” Utterance gives solidity and permanency to that which before existed in idea, and might have passed away: and, inasmuch as the tongue has every other member at its command to execute, according to their several powers, the things it has divulged, the whole man is become a partaker of its guilt and defilement^d. And, though all its communications are not equally polluting, yet is there a stain left by means of them, a stain which nothing but the Redeemer’s blood can ever wash away.]

2. Destructive—

[To such an astonishing degree has this fire gained the ascendant, that it has “inflamed the whole course of nature.” Look at *individuals*; what malignant passions has it kindled in them! Visit *families*; what animosities, and inextinguishable feuds has it produced! Survey *churches*; and you will find the unhallowed fire burning even in the sanctuary of God^e; and sometimes too, even in the very censers of his ministers^f. Cast your eyes round upon whole *nations*; and you will perceive that, times without number, it has kindled the flames of war, and spread desolation through the globe^g.]

To prove that this account is not exaggerated, we shall point out,

III. The reason of its producing these effects—

The tongue “itself is set on fire of hell”—

[Satan is the source and author of all the evils that proceed from the tongue. Does it falsify? behold it does so at the instigation of that wicked fiend, “the father of lies^h.” Does it discourage men from the prosecution of their duty? It does so as the devil’s agentⁱ. Does it accuse and scandalize the people of God? Who but Satan is the author of such calumnies^k? Does it disseminate error? the propagator of that error is Satan’s minister, however he be transformed into

^d Eccles. v. 6. Mark vii. 20—23.

^e By means of heretics, cavillers, and proud disputers, and others who cause divisions and dissensions.

^f Alluding to Lev. x. 1.

^g What has not been perpetrated during the French Revolution under the influence of those two words, liberty and equality!

^h Acts v. 3. John viii. 44.

ⁱ Matt. xvi. 23.

^k Rev. xii. 10.

an angel of light! Does it encourage any bad design? It is the devil himself who speaks by it^m. In every sin that it commits, it is actuated by "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedienceⁿ." Its whole "wisdom is earthly, sensual, *devilish*^o." It comes from hell, and leads to hell: and, if God were to withdraw his restraints here, as he does in hell, it would speedily produce a very hell upon earth.]

This alone can account for the effects that proceed from it—

[Doubtless the wickedness of the heart may account for much: but, if the flames were not fanned by satanic agency, we can scarcely conceive that they should rage with such an irresistible force, and to such a boundless extent.]

INFER—

1. How great must be the evil of the human heart!

[The heart is the fountain, in which "the evil treasure is^p;" the tongue is only the channel in which it flows. If the channel then be so vile, what must the fountain be? Yet every one of us has this tongue in his mouth, and this heart in his bosom: and, if God should leave us without restraint, there is not one of us but would proclaim all the evil of his heart, as much as the most lothesome sensualist, or most daring blasphemer.]

2. How much do we need the influences of the Holy Spirit!

[It is absolutely impossible for man to tame this unruly member^q. Yet restrained it must be, if ever we would be saved^t. What then shall we do? Shall we sit down in despair? God forbid. The Holy Spirit will help our infirmities^s, and Christ will give us his Spirit if we call upon him. Let us then look to Christ; and we shall prove by sweet experience, that his "grace is sufficient for us^t," and that through him, strengthening us, we can do all things^u."]

3. How careful should we be of every word we utter!

[Immense injury may we do by one unguarded word. We may take away a character which we can never restore, or

^l 2 Cor. xi. 3, 13—15.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 2.

^q ver. 7, 8.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 9

^o ver. 15.

^r Jam. i. 26.

^u Phil. iv. 13.

^m 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22.

^p Matt. xii. 35.

^s Rom. viii. 26.

inflict a wound which we can never heal. On this account we should "set a watch before the door of our lips^x." Nor is this a matter of expediency merely, but of necessity; for God has warned us that we shall give account of every idle word, and that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned^y. Let us then be utterly purposed that our mouth shall not offend^z. Let our tongue be as choice silver, or a tree of life, to enrich and comfort the Lord's people^a. Let our "speech be always with grace seasoned with salt," for the honour of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures^b.]

^x Ps. cxli. 3.

^y Matt. xii. 36, 37. and v. 22. last clause.

^z Ps. xvii. 3.

^a Prov. x. 20. and xv. 4.

^b Col. iv. 6. Eph. iv. 29.

MMCCCLXVIII.

INFLUENCE OF WISDOM UPON THE CONDUCT.

Jam. iii. 13. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

THE government of the tongue is of all things the most difficult; because every evil that is in the heart seeks for vent through that organ. A man who should be able so to controul it that no unadvised word should ever escape from his lips, would be a perfect man. Yet, if a man profess to be religious, and have not so much self-government as to impose an habitual restraint upon his tongue, he deceives his own soul, and his religion is vain^a. The gift of speech is to be improved for God by holy and heavenly communications, and the man who suffers it to be a vehicle of sin, discovers himself to be a hypocrite before God. The inconsistency of such conduct is obvious. "A fountain cannot send forth both fresh water and bitter; nor can a tree bear both olives and figs:" so neither can a renewed heart bear such different and discordant fruits^b. Whoever therefore professes godliness, should take care that no such inconsistency be found in him. "Who is a wise man,

^a Jam. i. 26.

^b ver. 9—12.

and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."

In these words we see,

I. The proper character of Christians—

When we say that the Christian is "a wise man, and endued with knowledge," we seem to be guilty of great arrogance; since it is a notorious fact, that the great majority of religious persons, as St. Paul himself acknowledges, are of the lower orders of society, whose talents and attainments are extremely limited^c. And even where the disadvantages of education are not so great, it is often found that "the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." How then can we presume to designate the godly by such inappropriate and high-sounding names? I answer, That the wisdom of this world is in God's estimation, folly; and that his people alone deserve the titles that are here assigned them. They are wise and intelligent,

1. As fearing God—

[They all without exception fear God. This is the lowest attainment that will justify any pretensions to true piety. And what is said of it by holy Job? "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding^d." Here then at once is their character fixed by the testimony of God himself. And to them does it belong exclusively: for of all others the Prophet Jeremiah says, "They have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them^e?" They may possess much which passes under that name: they may be skilled in arts and sciences, even as Solomon himself: yet they shew that they are fools and idiots, as it respects the things of God. They shew that they know not the true end of their being: they know not wherein real happiness consists: they know not the value of an immortal soul: they know not the judgment that awaits them, or the importance of preparing for it. Their views are circumscribed by the things of time and sense; and of heaven and heavenly things they have no knowledge. "Their wisdom and knowledge, such as it is, only perverts them^f." Hence of them it is said, that "madness

^c 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^e Jer. viii. 9.

^d Job xxviii. 28.

^f Isai. xlvii. 10.

is in their hearts while they live^g." But of the Lord's people, how ignorant soever they may be of other matters, it may be said, as on this very ground it was said of the Jews of old, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people^h."]

2. As instructed by God himself—

[This also is peculiar to them, and abundantly vindicates their title to the character given them in the text. To them universally, and to them exclusively, does that promise belong, "They shall all be taught of Godⁱ." They are taught of God, who by his Spirit has "opened the eyes of their understanding^k," and "brought them out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel^l." To them he has given a spiritual discernment, whereby they are enabled to discern the things of the Spirit^m. He has given to them such views of Christ as "flesh and blood could never have revealed to themⁿ." "Wonderful things are they enabled to behold in God's law^o." They see—what others have no conception of—the spirituality of that law, extending to every thought and desire of the heart. They see in that glass the unsearchable wickedness of their own hearts^p; their just desert of God's wrath and indignation; their utter need of a Saviour; the suitableness of Christ to their extreme necessities, and his sufficiency for all their wants. "They have an understanding given them to know Him that is true; and, in consequence of that, they are in Him that is true, even in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life^q." To them are made known things which from all eternity were hid in God; and things which the natural man, whatever be his endowments, cannot receive or know^r: yea, though they be in every other respect mere "babes, to them God has revealed what he has hid from the wise and prudent^s:" so that, whilst the man of learning, that is wise in his own conceit, looks down upon them with contempt as weak and foolish, they see the vanity of all his boasted wisdom, and they pity the blindness of his deluded mind. See how strongly all this is asserted by the Apostle Paul: "He that is spiritual (however destitute he may be of human learning) judgeth all things: yet he himself is judged of no man: (he estimates rightly the state of others, whilst they can form no just estimate of his:) for who (what carnal man) hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct *him*? But *we* (we who are taught of God) *have* the mind of

^g Eccl. ix. 3.

^k Eph. i. 17, 18.

ⁿ Matt. xvi. 16, 17.

^q 1 John v. 20.

^h Deut. iv. 6.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^o Ps. cxix. 18.

^r 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 14.

ⁱ John vi. 45.

^m 1 Cor. ii. 9—12.

^p 1 Kings viii. 38.

^s Matt. xi. 25.

Christ;" and consequently can form a correct judgment both of our own state and theirs^t. Thus, whilst all others are "perishing for lack of knowledge^u," they have "that unction of the Holy One whereby they know all things^x," and are become truly wise, being made "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ^y."]]

Such being their high character, they are concerned to know, and to consider well,

II. The conduct that befits them—

Doubtless their deportment should be such as is suited to the distinguished rank which they bear amongst their fellows: and their superiority to others should be marked,

1. In their works—

[Their whole "conversation should be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ^z." A tree must be known by its fruits; and their faith be judged of by their works^a. The whole tenour of these must be good: and, though they are not to be done with a view to man's applause, they must be such as to evince to all around them the excellence of the principles which they profess: "they must make their light so to shine before men, that all who behold their good works may glorify their Father that is in heaven^b." They must "*shew out of a good conversation their works.*"

But in relation to these (their works) the godly will find no difficulty, if they attend to that which is principally adverted to in our text, namely, to walk worthy of their profession.]]

2. In their spirit—

[The Christian is renewed, not in knowledge or in the outward conduct only, but "in *the spirit of his mind*^c." He is poured into a new mould, the mould of the Gospel^d. He is assimilated to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, especially in the meekness and gentleness of his spirit under the heaviest trials, and the bitterest provocations. Of him we are told, that "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth^e:" and in that particular he is more especially commended to us as an example: for "he suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not

^t 1 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

^u Hos. iv. 6.

^x 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^y 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^z Phil. i. 27.

^a Jam. i. 18.

^b Matt. v. 16.

^c Eph. iv. 23.

^d Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.

^e Isai. liii. 7.

again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously^f." This is the state which God approves. The outward act is *comparatively* of little value in his sight; since that may abound even where the inward principle is most corrupt: but when he sees "*the hidden man of the heart*" thus habited, he views it with delight: "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in his sight of great price^g." This is what the Apostle so beautifully inculcates in our text: "Let him shew out of a good conversation his works *with meekness of wisdom*." Meekness and wisdom are intimately and indissolubly connected: as it is said, "He that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly; whereas he who is slow to wrath, is of great understanding^h." In this then must every true Christian excel: and it will be in vain for him to pretend that he has been taught of God, if he have not learned, and practically too, this important lesson. Do you ask how the true Christian must be distinguished? St. Paul shall tell you: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do yeⁱ." This is the proper test of your principles. If you have knowledge, it is well: if you have faith, it is well: if you have works, it is well: but you may "have the knowledge of men and angels, and a faith that can remove mountains; and such zeal, both of an active and passive kind, as may lead you to give all your goods to feed the poor, and your bodies to be burned, and yet, after all, want that internal principle of love, which is necessary to your acceptance with God^k." Your proper character is, that you are "the meek of the earth: seek righteousness therefore, and seek meekness^l." "I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ^m" that you cultivate this spirit to the uttermost: for, if you have not in this respect "the mind that was in Christ Jesusⁿ," you are not, you cannot be, his^o.]

For the more extensive improvement of this subject,
I would add two solemn ADMONITIONS—

1. Rest not in attainments, whilst destitute of knowledge—

[There is a great diversity in the natural dispositions of men: some are from their very birth more meek and gentle than others: and certainly they whom nature has formed in

^f 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

^g 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^h Prov. xiv. 29.

ⁱ Col. iii. 12, 13.

^k 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^l Zeph. ii. 3.

^m 2 Cor. x. 1.

ⁿ 1 Hil. ii. 5.

^o 1 John iii. 24. and iv. 17.

this better mould, have much to be thankful for. But let not any one mistake this natural gentleness for grace. The meekness of which my text speaks, is "a fruit of the Spirit^p," and is always associated with true wisdom. It springs from a sense of our own unworthiness, and of the obligations which we owe to Christ for all the wonders of redeeming love. It is a humble submission to Almighty God, whose hand is viewed in all events, and whose love is tasted in the bitterest dispensations. It is a resignation of the soul to him, that he may perfect it in his own way, and glorify himself upon it, as seemeth him good. Before you draw inferences then from your comparative proficiency in gentle habits, inquire how they have been obtained? Examine whether they are associated with this heavenly wisdom; and whether they are the result of deep humiliation, and of ardent love to God? If you have not been taught of God to know yourselves and the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in darkness even until now: and though you appear to be in the fold of Christ, you have never entered it at the strait gate, and therefore are not regarded by him as his sheep indeed. O! may God instruct you, and by his Holy Spirit guide you into all truth!]

2. Rest not in knowledge, whilst destitute of these attainments—

[Many possess a very clear knowledge of Scripture truths, whilst yet they experience not their sanctifying and transforming efficacy. It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess religion are grievously under the dominion of evil tempers. It was evidently so among those to whom St. James addressed this epistle. But, beloved, "these things ought not so to be," and must not so be: for, if they be, they will terminate in fearful disappointment at the last day. Think not to excuse yourselves by saying, That your temper is naturally hasty and violent. It may be so: but this is no reason why it is to have the mastery over you. If the struggles which you have to maintain be the greater, the strength of Christ shall be the more displayed in the victories which he will enable you to gain. Only go to him in fervent and continual prayer, and you shall find, that "his grace is sufficient for you:" it never failed yet; nor shall it ever fail, when sought in sincerity and truth. Only prostrate yourselves before him with shame, and sorrow, and contrition, and implore of him the assistance of his good Spirit; and then will he "beautify you with salvation^q:" for "instead of the thorn shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall grow up the myrtle-tree: and you shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off^r."]]

^p Gal. v. 22, 23.

^q Ps. cxlix 4.

^r Isaⁱ. lv. 13.

MMCCCLXIX.

THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION.

Jam. iii. 17. *The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

RELIGION, like a tree, must be judged of by its fruits. That which savours of pride, earthliness, or sensuality, is not of God. Its character is justly drawn in the words before us. It is,

I. Holy in its nature—

Religion, above all other things, is entitled to the name of “wisdom”—

[It enlightens the mind, informs the judgment, regulates the life; and he who lives under its influence, is wise in the estimation of God himself.]

Being from above, it resembles its Divine Author—

[Religion is a beam issuing from God the fountain of light; and, as “in him is no darkness at all,” so neither is there any thing impure in that which flows from him. It may be mixed with sin, but in its own nature it is “pure;” and, in proportion as it prevails, it will dissipate the clouds of ignorance and sin. All “spiritual or fleshly filthiness” will surely vanish before it^a.]

In consequence of this it is,

II. Useful in its tendency—

It renders us,

1. Amiable in our spirit—

[Though men differ widely in their natural tempers, yet the unregenerate are, on many occasions, quarrelsome, fierce, implacable. But as soon as ever religion exerts its influence on our minds, we mortify these unhallowed tempers, and become “peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated.” From thenceforth it is the delight of our souls to cultivate and promote peace, to maintain in ourselves a meek and quiet spirit, and to exercise, as occasion may require, forbearance and forgiveness to all around us.]

^a Matt. v. 8. Acts xv. 9. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

2. Benevolent in our conduct—

[Compassion and diligence are inseparable attributes of true religion. The real Christian is not, like the barren fig-tree, covered with the leaves of an outward profession, but destitute of fruit. He labours to abound in every good word and work, and to benefit to the utmost the bodies and souls of his fellow-creatures. His heart is “full” of love, and out of the abundance of his heart he both speaks and acts.]

It is within us a living principle, that is,

III. Uniform in its operations—

Its extends,

1. To duties without limitation—

[The grace of God will not admit of “partiality” in our obedience. It will stimulate us to difficult and self-denying duties, as well as to those which are more easy and pleasant; and will make us as solicitous to do what is right towards strangers or enemies, as towards our own friends or partisans^b.]

2. To desires without reserve—

[Religion penetrates to the inmost soul, and regulates all our motives and principles of action. The person whose *outward* conduct *only* is good, is in God’s sight no other than a “whited sepulchre.” The man whose heart is right with God, will watch against all selfish ends, and endeavour to act with a single eye to the glory of his God.]

INFER—

1. How unjustly is religion condemned in the world!

[Many consider religion as destructive of all personal and social happiness; but what is there in this representation of religion that deserves such a character? Let the world call it *folly* if they will; but God accounts it “*wisdom*.”]

2. What reason have the most godly to blush and be ashamed!

[We must not estimate our religion by our opinions so much as by our practice. Doubtless we must build on Christ as our only foundation; but we have no evidence of an union with him any further than we raise upon him this holy superstructure. Alas! what poor builders have the very best of us been; and how little progress have we made when we judge by this test!]

^b 1 Tim. v. 21.

3. What need have we to wait continually upon our God in prayer!

[This wisdom is "from above," and can be derived from God alone; and how can we obtain it of him, but in the exercise of prayer? Let us then ask it of him, who has promised to impart it "liberally, and without upbraiding^c."]

^c Jam. i. 5.

MMCCCLXX.

FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD.

Jam. iv. 4. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

THERE is a boldness of speech, which not only comports well with the character of God's ambassadors, but is necessary to the faithful discharge of the ministerial office. To those who are unused to the figurative language of Scripture, the address of St. James to the professors of Christianity may appear coarse and severe. But the truth he delivered, needed to be strongly insisted on even in the apostolic age; so much did the practice of the Church fall short of the knowledge which was at that time generally diffused. As to the appellation which he gave the worldly temporizing Christians, it could not fail of being understood in its proper sense; because all knew that God called himself the husband of the Church; and consequently, that the violation of the people's engagements to him justly entitled them to the name by which they were addressed.

To the Christians of this age the doctrine of the text should be very fully opened. It is indeed far from being calculated to please men: but we proceed to the consideration of it, in the hope that the word shall not go forth in vain.

We shall endeavour to shew,

I. What we are to understand by the friendship of the world—

[The “world” must be understood in its largest sense, as comprehending not only the people, but also the pleasures, riches, and honours of the world^a. To draw the precise limits of that which is here called “the friendship” of the world, is not so easy. Nevertheless we may ascertain this with as much accuracy as is necessary on the present occasion.

If we love any one person above all others, and strive to please him habitually, not only in common with others, but even in direct opposition to them, we certainly must be acknowledged to have a considerable degree of friendship for him. Let us inquire then,

1. Which do we love more, the world, or God? — — —
2. Which do we strive to please when their commands are irreconcilable with each other? — — —

If conscience testify that the world have in these respects a decided preference, we are, beyond all doubt, the friends of the world.]

II. In what respects it is enmity with God—

[This may seem a strong expression; but it does not exceed the truth. For the friendship of the world is, in fact, *a denial of God's excellency*, since it declares that the world is a better portion than he — — — It is *a contempt of his authority*, seeing that when he says, “My son, give me thy heart,” it makes us reply with Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that I should serve him? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice” — — — It is also *a violation of our most solemn engagements with him*. He is our Husband; and we bound ourselves to him in baptism to “renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil,” and to be his, even his only. But by receiving the world to our bosom, we suffer that to invade his property, and, as the text intimates, are guilty of spiritual adultery — — — Moreover it is (as far as our influence extends) *a banishing of the very remembrance of him from the earth*. God himself testifies respecting the friends of the world, that “he is not in all their thoughts:” and it is certain that, while they can converse readily on every worldly subject, they like not to hear or speak of his name: and if there were not a few who stand forth as his witnesses upon earth, his very name would soon be blotted out of our remembrance — — —

If the friends of the world would view their conduct in this light, they would see an extreme malignity in the practices which they now maintain and justify: and they would tremble

^a 1 John ii. 15, 16.

at the thought of being found enemies to HIM, who, as omniscient, sees; as holy, hates; as just, condemns; and, as almighty, will punish, such daring impiety.]

III. The state of those who cultivate it—

[Nothing can be more express than the declaration of the text: they are “enemies of God.” Whether they intend it or not, whether they think of it or not, *they are enemies of God.* However sober, modest, kind, generous, and amiable they may be in their deportment, they still are *enemies of God.* Exalt their characters ever so highly, so that they shall appear in the most enviable light, you must bring them down at last with this melancholy exception, *but* “they are *enemies of God*” — — —

Nor is this a matter that admits of doubt. St. James even appealed to the very persons whom he was condemning, and made them judges in their own cause; “Know ye not this?” can ye doubt of it one moment? does not the Scripture fully declare it? does not experience universally attest it?

But there is an emphasis in the text that marks this truth in the strongest manner. As an avowed desire to compass the death of the king is treason, though that wish should never be accomplished; so the determining to maintain friendship with the world, when God commands us to “come out from it and be separate,” is treason against the King of kings: the very *willing* to side in this manner with the world, *constitutes*^c *us enemies of God.*]

ADDRESS—

1. The friends of the world—

[It is to be feared that even in a Christian assembly the doctrine of the text will be called in question; and that many, whose conduct in other respects is unexceptionable, impute no blame to themselves for their attachment to the world. Yea, so ignorant of their duty are the generality of Christians, that instead of saying, “Know ye *not*,” we must rather say to them, “*Know ye* that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” For, alas! few in this day seem to know it, or even to suspect it: and their reply to us would be, ‘No, I neither know it, nor believe it; nor shall any thing that you can say persuade me to receive a sentiment so unreasonable, and so contrary to common sense.’ But, brethren, so it is, whether ye know it or not. Let none therefore deceive themselves, or attempt to unite the friendship of the world with friendship with God; for that is impossible, as our Lord has plainly told us: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”]

^b 2 Kings v. 1.

^c *Ος ἂν βουληθῆ καθίσταται.

2. The friends of God—

[It is a great mercy to be “delivered from the love of this present world.” But we may mistake our experience with respect to this. Age, sickness, poverty, disappointment, and other trials may render us *apparently* indifferent to the world, while yet, under other circumstances, our old attachment to it would revive. Let us take care therefore that, as an evidence of our friendship with God, our delight in him proportionably increase. This must of necessity accompany our deadness to the world. As one scale descends, the other must rise. We must guard also against a relapse; for the world is ever soliciting a place in our affections; and if we be not on our guard, we shall, like Demas, forsake the path of self-denial for the more enchanting one of earthliness and self-indulgence^d.]

^d 2 Tim. iv. 10.

MMCCCLXXI.

REPENTANCE URGED.^a

Jam. iv. 8—10. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

THE season of Lent has been set apart by the Church for the purpose of calling all her members to deep humiliation of soul before God: and, were it observed according to the intention of those who destined it to this holy use, there can be no doubt but that it would tend exceedingly to the advancement of religion in the world. So, at least, the reformers of our Church judged; as appears from the peculiarly solemn service which is appointed for the day with which this season commences. And I cannot but think, that, whilst we value ourselves on an increased freedom from the errors of superstition, we have reason to fear that we have suffered loss in respect of real piety; since, with the forms of religion, we have relinquished also, in no small degree,

^a For Ash-Wednesday.

the spirit of it. Not that a becoming reverence for this season has altogether ceased. On the contrary, a discourse which was not pertinent to the occasion would very generally be deemed unseasonable and indecorous: so that I have at least your prejudices and your expectations in my favour, whilst I propose to your consideration the solemn subject before us.

In the Apostle's exhortation we see,

I. An encouragement to repentance—

A person under conviction of sin is ready to fear that God will not receive him to mercy—

[Nor is this without reason, when we consider how awfully we have all departed from our God. Though “in him we live and move and have our being,” and are bound by all possible ties to obey and honour him, we have altogether “contemned^b” his authority, and “lived without him in the world^c.” We have in our hearts said to him, “Depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways^d.” We have altogether “forgotten him^e,” and wished that there were “no God^f,” or, at least, that, as to his claims upon us, he might be “made to cease from before us^g.” Would it be wonderful, therefore, if God, in his righteous indignation, should execute on *all*, what he certainly will execute on every *impenitent* offender, a sentence of utter and everlasting exclusion from his presence^h? — — — This is *merited* by all; and therefore might well be *apprehended* by all, if God, of his unbounded mercy, had not assured us of his willingness to receive returning penitents.]

But God has declared, that, “if we draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us”—

[He will not despise the prayer of the poor destituteⁱ, or “cast out any who come unto him” in his Son's name^k. However great or long-continued their sins may have been, he will not withhold his mercy from them^l. No, in truth: “he will incline his ear unto them, and hear them:” he will “look down upon them from the habitation of his holiness and his glory^m;” yea, “he will rend the heavens, and come downⁿ;” and “at their cry he will answer, Here I am^o.” Even “before

^b Ps. x. 13.

^e Jer. ii. 32.

^h Prov. i. 24—31.

^l Isai. i. 18.

^o Isai. lviii. 9.

^c Eph. ii. 12.

^f Ps. xiv. 1.

ⁱ Ps. cii. 17.

^m Isai. lxiii. 15.

^d Job xxi. 14.

^g Isai. xxx. 11.

^k John vi. 37.

ⁿ Isai. lxiv. 1.

the supplication is well uttered, he will answer; and whilst they are yet speaking, he will hear^p." No language can express the depth of the condescension which he will manifest to the poor suppliant, or the riches of that grace which he will impart to the believing penitent. Pardon, peace, holiness, glory, are not too great for him to bestow on the most unworthy of men, who call upon him with their whole hearts.]

But, that we may not miscarry in the exercise of this duty, the Apostle gives us,

II. A direction for the acceptable performance of it—

Our repentance must be attended with,

1. A sincere renunciation of all evil—

[Oh! "cleanse your hands, ye sinners;" and think not to find acceptance with God, whilst ye "hold fast iniquity" of any kind. Hear what God said to his people of old: "When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: *your hands* are full of blood. Wash ye; *make you clean*; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes: cease to do evil: learn to do well^q." In truth, "the very prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord^r." Look, I pray you, to all the habits of your past life; your conduct in your respective trades and callings, no less than in your common intercourse with mankind: and, as God enjoins you to "shake your hands from holding of bribes," so I would say, Shake your hands from holding of unjust gains of any kind, and from retaining any evil which you have been wont to perpetrate^s.

Nor is this sufficient: you must put away evil from the *heart*, as well as in the *act*: for "if you regard iniquity in *your heart*, the Lord will not hear you^t." "Your heart must be right with God^u," who demands the whole of it for himself^x, and will not accept "a divided heart^y." "Purify your hearts then, ye double-minded:" for "ye cannot serve God and mammon too^z." You must "not love the world, nor any thing that is in it," if you would approve yourselves to God^a: the very desire to retain friendship with the world is constructive treason, and a decisive proof of enmity against God^b.

^p Isai. lxxv. 24.

^q Isai. i. 12—16.

^r Prov. xxi. 27. and xxxviii. 9.

^s Isai. xxxiii. 15.

^t Ps. lxxvi. 18.

^u Ps. lxxviii. 37.

^x Prov. xxiii. 26.

^y Hos. x. 2.

^z Matt. vi. 24.

^a 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^b ver. 4. See the Greek.

See, then, that ye be “Israelites indeed, in whom is no allowed guile^c.” Then, whether it be “under the fig-tree,” or in any place whatever, God will behold you with complacency; and not only listen to your prayers, but exceed in his answers your largest petitions or desires^d.]

2. A deep contrition for all your past iniquities—

[A forsaking of sin is not sufficient. There are many grounds on which some lust may be subdued: a change of age, or even of our circumstances in life, may operate to the abstaining from some sins, whilst yet the evil of them may never have been truly felt. Sin, of whatever kind, is hateful in the sight of God; and must become so in our eyes. “Be afflicted therefore, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, if ever ye would be lifted up.” It is “the broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise^e:” and all repentance that falls short of that, will only prove “a repentance that must itself be repented of^f.” But, if ye come to God with a holy and ingenuous shame, even though you had been as wicked as Manasseh himself, you shall not be rejected: for “all manner of wickedness shall be forgiven unto men^g,” nor will God ever suffer any human being to “seek his face in vain^h.” No, verily; if he see one prostrating himself before him in dust and ashes, he will “*lift him up*,” just as the father in the parable did his prodigal son; testifying over him the joy with which he will restore him, not to his favour only, but to all the blessedness that he himself is able to impartⁱ. He that thus sows in tears, shall surely “reap in joy^k,” and “he who thus humbles himself, shall surely be exalted^l.”]

APPLICATION—

1. It may be, that some amongst you doubt the *necessity* of such a repentance—

But who amongst you is not “a sinner” before God? or, who amongst you has not been “double-minded,” giving at least a *portion* of his *heart* to the creature, when *the whole of it* should have been fixed on God? — — — I accuse not any one amongst you of *gross* sin: but as corresponding with the character drawn in my text, I must accuse every child of man. I grant there is a great diversity in the guilt of different men: but there is no man so innocent as not to need repentance,

^c John i. 47.

^e Ps. li. 17.

^h Isai. xlv. 19.

^l Luke xviii. 14.

^d John i. 48—51. with Eph. iii. 20.

^f 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

ⁱ Luke xv. 20—24.

^g Matt. xii. 31.

^k Ps. cxxvi. 6.

and repentance too of the very kind that is here required. I pray you therefore, brethren, not to rest satisfied with a few faint acknowledgments of your guilt; but to abase yourselves before God, even as holy Job did, in dust and ashes — — —]

2. There may possibly be others, also, who doubt its *efficacy*—

[You may perhaps have sought the Lord for some time, and not yet have obtained an answer of peace. But does this discourage you? Think, I pray you, how long God sought after you, and followed you with his invitations and entreaties to return unto him. Think, I say, of this; and then you will acknowledge, that, if you cried to him for a hundred years, and yet obtained an answer only at the last hour, you would have no reason to complain. But God has gracious designs in delaying the manifestations of his favour towards you. He desires to humble you the more deeply before him, and to prepare you more fully for the due reception of his favour. St. Peter says, “Humble yourselves under his mighty hand, and he will exalt you *in due time*^m.” And who is the best judge what “*the due time*” is? Surely you may well leave this matter to Him who cannot err; and who, “having given you his dear Son, will surely with him also freely give you all thingsⁿ.” You yourselves do not give to your child a thing the instant that he cries for it, but judge of the fittest season wherein to give it. Wait, then, the Lord’s leisure; assured, that “the vision, though delayed, shall not tarry” beyond the period which you yourselves, if you saw things as clearly as God does, would be the foremost to assign for it^o.]

^m 1 Pet. v. 6.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 32.

^o Hab. ii. 3.

MMCCCLXXII.

THE FOLLY OF UNDUE SECURITY.

Jam. iv. 13, 14. *Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

RELIGION has ever a tendency to decline. Sin has pre-occupied the ground: and though religion expels it for a time, it is ever watching, as it were, for an opportunity to return, and to regain its former ascendant over the soul. Even in the Apostolic age

manifold declensions were found, not only in individuals, but in whole Churches: and St. James, with the utmost fidelity and earnestness, set himself to counteract the fatal evil. Amongst the various evils which he had to reprove, was that of undue security, or of presuming on the success of our plans for future advancement, without any becoming reference to the shortness and uncertainty of life: and there being still but too much reason to complain of this habit in the Christian world, I shall distinctly mark,

I. The habit which is here censured—

The Apostle does not intend to condemn all forethought and contrivance; for then we should all be as weak and foolish as children: nor, indeed, if prospective plans were unlawful, would any one branch of agriculture or commerce, or even of liberal education, be carried forward. It is the proud reliance on our own wisdom, and the confident expectation of time to come, that is here condemned; and this is,

1. A great evil—

[What is it but an entire forgetfulness of our dependence upon God? For who is it that can give success to any plans, but God himself? And, if we could command success, who can tell whether that which we seek as a blessing, may not prove to us the greatest curse? Even an unqualified desire of the things themselves, without a reference to the wisdom of God to choose for us, and his will to bestow them on us, is highly sinful. It contravenes that express command, “Thou shalt not covet,” and is, in fact, an usurpation of God’s prerogative to direct and govern the affairs of men. Besides, such a confident expectation of life is of itself most offensive to God: for it is “he who holdeth our souls in life:” “in him we live, and move, and have our being:” and the contemplation of life, irrespective of his agency, is no other than practical atheism.]

2. A common evil—

[We imbibe these atheistical sentiments from our earliest infancy. Scarcely any other ever meet our ears. Our very parents are constantly speaking to us of what is to be gained by us in future years in consequence of our own care and industry. As we grow up, we buoy up ourselves with the

same unqualified hopes and expectations: from youth to manhood, and from manhood to old age, we still continue to speak of future events as depending on ourselves, rather than on God; and seldom, if ever, have any direct reference in our minds to the superintending and all-directing providence of God. Indeed, it is from hence that our exertions principally arise: and so gratifying to our minds is this corrupt habit, that our chief happiness in life arises from it: for it is a well-known fact, that the fond dreams of hope almost invariably exceed the pleasures of actual enjoyment.]

Such is the evil which the Apostle censured in the words before us: which, however, lead us yet further to consider,

II. The folly of it—

There is nothing in reality at our command, or under our controul. We cannot by any means secure,

1. The success of our labours—

["We cannot tell what shall be on the morrow:" we cannot tell how soon circumstances may arise to make us view that as an evil, which we just before coveted as a good. The fact is, that there is scarcely a man living, who has not as much reason to bless God for the dispensations by which his desires have been thwarted, as for those by which they have been gratified. How foolish then is it to take the disposal of events out of God's hands, instead of committing it to him, whose wisdom cannot err, and whose power cannot be counteracted! We may, like Israel, cause him "in wrath to give us" the object of our inordinate desires, and constrain him to inflict upon us the judgment denounced against his disobedient people; "I will curse their blessings."]

2. The continuance of our lives—

["What is our life? it is a vapour that appeareth but a little time, and then vanisheth away." This is a truth which all acknowledge; and which, if duly considered, would abate the ardour of our earthly pursuits, and moderate our too sanguine expectations. Who has not seen persons in the bloom of youth, when promising themselves years of prosperity and joy, cut off suddenly, even as the flower of the grass, which in the morning looks gay and flourishing, and in the evening is cut down, dried up, and withered? Yes, a light, airy, unsubstantial vapour is but too just an image of life, which in its best estate is vanity, and in the twinkling of an eye may pass away for ever. Is it wise then to be either looking forward to

future joys, or resting too confidently in joys possessed, when for aught that we know, the decree may have already gone forth, "This year," this month, this very day, "shalt thou die^a?"

Let us LEARN from this subject,

1. To have a direct reference to God in all things^b—

[God will govern all things, whether we acknowledge him or not: and, if we refer all to him, he will govern all things for our good. Not a hair of our head shall fall to the ground without his special permission.]

2. To be moderate in our anticipations of earthly bliss—

[What a lesson is taught us by the fate of him who said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry." The reply of God to him was, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." The true way to avoid disappointment from earthly things, is, to regard them as vanity and vexation of spirit, and to be contented with such a measure of them as God sees to be best for us.]

3. To bend all our attention to the concerns of eternity—

[These will never disappoint our hopes: we shall never seek eternal happiness in vain. Our desires in reference to them cannot be too large, nor our expectations from them too sanguine. Who, on coming to our blessed Saviour, was ever cast out? In what instance did the blood of Christ ever prove insufficient to justify, or his grace to save? As for life, the cutting short of that will not deprive us of any blessing which we have ever sought: on the contrary, it will bring us to the speedier possession of all good. We must indeed, in spiritual as well as carnal things, place our hope in God alone; because God alone can "give us either to will or to do;" and in the bestowment of his blessings he will consult only "his own will and pleasure:" but if we look steadfastly to him, and rely confidently on him alone, "we shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

^a Here any instances of hopes disappointed by sudden death may be referred to.

^b ver. 15, 16.

MMCCCLXXIII.

SINS OF OMISSION CONSIDERED.

Jam. iv. 17. *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

THERE is not any thing of which men are more convinced, than the shortness and uncertainty of life: yet in the habit of their minds they live as if they were certain of many months and years to come. They form their plans and projects as if they were sure of living to see them executed. Of this the Apostle complains in the preceding context, because it altogether overlooks God in the government of the world, and is nothing less than practical atheism.

Having pointed out the evil of such a habit, the Apostle deduces from it this general position; that, as the person who in theory acknowledges the providence of God, and practically denies it, sins; so, whoever omits to do any other thing which he knows to be right, sins also.

It is my intention,

I. To confirm this truth—

Let us consider what such conduct manifests. It argues,

1. An insensibility in the conscience—

[God has given to every man a conscience, to be, as it were, his vicegerent in the soul. It is designed by him to check us, when we are in danger of committing any evil, and to stimulate us continually to whatever is pleasing in his sight. But if, when we know what is good, we do it not, we shew that we have silenced the voice of conscience, or have rendered ourselves incapable of attending to its suggestions. And is this no sin? Is a sentinel who sleeps at his post guilty of no crime, when through his unwatchfulness a camp or city is surprised? And is not a minister, who, when he seeth the sword of God's vengeance uplifted to strike his people, neglects to warn them, justly chargeable with their blood^a? Shall not guilt then attach to you, who lull your consciences

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 6.

asleep, and say to yourselves, "I shall have peace, notwithstanding I walk after the imagination of my own evil heart^b?" The very heathen were charged with guilt, because, "when from the works of creation they knew God, they glorified him not as God^c:" depend upon it, therefore, that your neglect of known and acknowledged duties cannot but involve your souls also in much guilt.]

2. An indifference to the welfare of our own souls—

[It is by our works that we shall be judged in the last day. We are as servants that have talents committed to us: they who make a good improvement of them will have a proportionable reward: but those who hide them in a napkin will be dealt with as wicked and unprofitable servants^d. What then do you say, in fact, when you neglect an acknowledged duty? You say, in reality, 'I care not for my soul; I care not whether it is happy in a future world, or not: I know that by a diligent attention to all God's commands, I might advance its eternal interests: and I know that by inattention to his will I shall involve it in misery: but let me have present ease; let me be excused the trouble of doing what does not suit my taste and inclination: let me have the world with its pleasures and interests: and if through my love to present things I must lose my soul, be it so: I consent to "the exchange^e:" "I will sell my birth-right for a mess of pottage^f.'" Tell me now, Is there nothing criminal in this? May not such persons be justly charged with "loving death, and wronging their own souls^g?" Yes: whether a man do a thing of which he doubts the lawfulness, or neglect to do a thing of which he admits the necessity, he is equally "a sinner against his own soul:" for, as "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin^h," so to know what is good and to neglect it, is sin also.]

3. A contempt of Almighty God—

[Whatever obedience a man may pay to all other commandments, if there be one which he knowingly violates, or wilfully neglects, he is a rebel against God, and a contemner of his Divine Majestyⁱ. For the same authority that enjoins one, enjoins all: and if it be disregarded in one, it is in reality disregarded in all^k: for it is impossible to have a due regard to it in *any* thing, if we have not a regard to it in *every* thing. And is it no sin to cast off the yoke of God, and to say, "As for the word that has been spoken to me in the name of the

^b Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^c Rom. i. 21.

^d Luke xix. 15—27.

^e Matt. xvi. 26.

^f Heb. xii. 16.

^g Prov. viii. 36.

^h Rom. xiv. 23.

ⁱ Ps. x. 13. Luke x. 16.

^k Jam. ii. 10, 11.

Lord, I will not hearken unto it¹?" Our blessed Lord has told us what he will say to such persons in the last day: "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." "Those who knew not their Lord's will," and sinned through ignorance, are chargeable with guilt, and will be visited with punishment; because they had the means of instruction, and did not diligently improve them: but if "the servant who knew not his Lord's will shall be beaten with few stripes, be assured, that the servant who knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes^m."]

Verily this is a solemn truth, and deeply to be weighed by every child of man. Let me therefore proceed,

II. To suggest some reflections arising out of it—

Who that duly considers it must not see,

1. What ground we all have for humiliation before God—

[I will suppose that we have never committed any enormous sin, and that in respect of *the letter* of the law we have been as blameless as ever Paul was previous to his conversion: still, are we not sinners? There has been no doubt on any of our minds whether we had occasion for the acknowledged duties of repentance, faith, and obedience: but have we diligently performed these duties? Have we from day to day humbled ourselves before God, and wept in dust and ashes? Have we laboured to find out all our past transgressions, to spread them before God with penitential sorrow, and to implore with all earnestness the remission of them? — — — Have we fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge, as to the hope that is set before us? Have we pleaded before God the merit of his sacrifice, and sprinkled our souls with his all-atonement blood? Is this the daily habit of our minds; and the only source of peace to our souls? — — — And have we given up ourselves to God without reserve, to fulfil his every command, and to live altogether to his glory? Do we for this end study his blessed word with all diligence, that we may know his mind? and do we labour incessantly to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?" We have known these things to be right; but have we done them? Can we appeal to the heart-searching God, that this has been, and yet is, the daily tenour of our lives? Must we not rather acknowledge, that no one day of our lives has been so occupied with

¹ Jer. xlv. 16.

^m Luke xii. 47, 48.

these duties as it ought to have been? Then we are sinners, “sinners before the Lord exceedinglyⁿ,” and, if we turn not to God in newness of life, we shall speedily become monuments of his wrath and fiery indignation.]

2. The folly of seeking salvation by any righteousness of our own—

[I will not only grant, as before, that we are free from any gross sins, but I will admit, that we have done a great deal that was good and praiseworthy. But how shall we get rid of this immense load of guilt which we have contracted by our wilful and habitual neglects? Our good deeds, admitting that we have performed some, have been only occasional: whereas our neglects have been continual, from the first moment that we began to be capable of acting. Our good deeds have all been marred with imperfections; but our neglects have had in them no mixture of good: they were pure and unmixed evil; and in comparison of them, any good that we do is lighter than dust upon the balance. In truth, no man who reflected a moment on my text could any more entertain a hope of being justified by any righteousness of his own, than he could form a purpose to create a world. He would see, that, whilst he was doing those very works on which he was inclined to build his hopes, the weakness and defectiveness of his exertions infinitely outweighed any merit which they might be supposed to have; and rendered his works a just ground for condemnation, rather than of justification before God. Bear in mind then the declaration before us; and limit not your views to sins of *commission*, but extend them to sins of *omission*: and then you will no longer hesitate to renounce all hope in yourselves, but will say with the Apostle Paul, “I desire to be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith^o.”]

3. The improvement which we should make of divine ordinances—

[We should not come to the house of God merely to satisfy conscience and to perform a duty, but really to get instruction respecting the mind and will of God. A mariner about to navigate a ship, and having the assistance of a skilful builder to examine whether she was in a state fit for sea, would not listen to his observations as a mere matter of curiosity or amusement, nor would he shut his eyes to any defects that were pointed out: his object would be, to find out

ⁿ Gen. xiii. 13.

^o Phil. iii. 9.

defects, in order to their being remedied: and if only a doubt were suggested, he would endeavour to ascertain how far there was any foundation for it. He would say, I am about to commit my life and property to this vessel, and I must not stay till I am got into the midst of the ocean before I search into her state: it will be too late to do that when I am in the midst of a storm: I must do it now, before I go on board. Precisely in this way should you come up to the house of God. You are about to embark for eternity: and the instructions given by your minister are intended to point out every defect in your vessel, in order to its being remedied in time. Shut not then your ears to his instructions; and close not your eyes to your defects: but bless God for every assistance which you can obtain in a matter of such infinite importance, and endeavour to improve it for the salvation of your soul. In particular, search out *your defects*; and cry mightily to God to pardon them for the Redeemer's sake, and to repair them by the influences of his good Spirit: so may you hope to navigate in safety this tempestuous ocean; and in due season to "have an abundant entrance" into the haven of eternal bliss.]

MMCCCLXXIV.

PATIENT PERSEVERANCE URGED.

Jam. v. 7, 8. *Be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

CHRISTIANITY, even in the apostolic age, was professed by multitudes who neither understood its doctrines nor obeyed its precepts. The great and fundamental doctrine of justification by faith was denied by some, and abused by others; who took occasion from it to "turn the grace of God into licentiousness," and to "continue in sin that grace might abound." To this latter class more especially St. James directed his epistle. He did indeed write to the unbelieving Jews also: for his epistle is addressed "To the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad:" and, as they were in no state to receive such affectionate salutations as are observable in the

epistles which were addressed to Christians only, he contented himself with merely sending to them "greeting^a." There were indeed many truly pious persons who were suffering for the truth's sake; and these he sought to comfort and encourage. The foregoing part of this chapter seems addressed to the former; the text and following verses to the latter. We cannot conceive that the oppressive and murderous conduct which he lays to the charge of some, could admit of their being numbered with the Church of God. But their cruelties rendered the path of the true Christians who were among them far more difficult: and therefore, after warning those who were so grossly violating every principle of common morality, he encourages the suffering Christians to persevere in a patient discharge of their duty, and in an assured expectation of recompence at the coming of their Lord.

We shall consider the injunction which he gives them in a two-fold view;

I. In reference to the terms by which it is expressed—

These are strong and energetic. Twice he says, "Be patient;" that is, bear with all long-suffering the trials that are come upon you: and then he adds, "Stablish your hearts;" let them be so firmly fixed, that nothing may ever shake them.

Now from these expressions we gain a very considerable insight into Christianity: we see, that,

1. It exposes us to heavy trials—

[No man could profess Christianity at its first establishment, but at the peril of his life: thousands and myriads being called to seal the truth with their blood. If the same persecutions be not experienced at this day, let us not imagine that they have therefore ceased: for it is as true at this day as it was in the apostolic age, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." And every man now, as well as then, must be prepared to lay down his life for Christ, if he will be acknowledged as "a disciple indeed."

^a Jam. i. 1.

Nor let it be thought that the persecutions of the present day are so very light. It is no easy thing for flesh and blood to withstand the hatred, and contempt, and ridicule to which he will be assuredly exposed, if he set himself in earnest to serve the Lord. The fear of these consequences is abundantly sufficient to deter multitudes from embracing the Gospel, and to turn back multitudes after they have embraced it. True it is, that all are not exposed to these things in an equal degree: but every follower of Christ must have his cross to bear, and be conformed to his Divine Master in sufferings, before he can be made like him in glory^b.]

2. It calls for great exertions—

[Religion is the same that it ever was, and calls for the same efforts on the part of all who embrace it. A race is not won at this day without exertion; nor does a wrestler overcome a strong antagonist without effort: nor a man engaged in warfare obtain a triumph without labour. Our spiritual enemies are as strong as ever: sin is not subdued and mortified by listless endeavours; nor is Satan defeated without much watchfulness and prayer. The whole man must be engaged. We must summon to the conflict all our faculties and powers; yea, such are the efforts required, that, if we be not strengthened by that same almighty power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, we can never prevail^c.]

3. It requires incessant efforts even to the end—

[There is to be no period when we are to give way either to impatience or sloth. However long our trials may continue, we are “in patience to possess our souls:” and however difficult the path of duty may be, we are “never to be weary in well-doing.” God should be able to say of us, as he does of the Church of Ephesus, “Thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and not fainted^d.” This in particular is intimated in our text. It is supposed that the trials are long, and heavy, and calculated to turn us from the faith: and hence it is necessary that we “be long-suffering,” and that our “souls be established with grace.” It is in this way only that we can finally prevail: for to those only who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, will eternal life be adjudged^e.]

To enter fully into the Apostle’s exhortation, we must consider it,

II. In reference to the comparison with which it is illustrated—

^b Rom. viii. 17. ^c Eph. i. 19, 20. ^d Rev. ii. 3. ^e Rom. ii. 7.

This Apostle seems particularly to affect easy and familiar illustrations. The whole epistle abounds with them. He compares certain hearers of the word to persons beholding themselves in a glass, and then forgetting what manner of persons they were. Those who have a dead and unproductive faith he compares to persons who speak kind words to an indigent brother or sister without relieving their necessities. Those who govern not their tongue he reproveth, by contrasting their conduct with horses that obey the bit; with ships that are turned by a helm; with beasts, birds, and even fishes of the sea, all of which have been tamed by men: and by warning them, that as no fountain can send forth sweet water and bitter, and no tree bear both olives and figs, so they can be no true Christians, whilst such unworthy and inconsistent speeches issue from their mouths. Here in our text he brings to our view the husbandman, whose continued labours and patient expectations form a fit model for the Christian. Him we are called to resemble,

1. In a steady prosecution of the appointed means—

[Many are the discouragements which the husbandman meets with in the cultivation of his ground. Sometimes the weather is untoward: sometimes blights, or insects, or mildew, injure his crops: sometimes drought almost destroys all his hopes: but still he goes on from year to year, ploughing his ground, clearing it from weeds, manuring it, casting in his seed, and harrowing it; and this he does, not knowing for certain that a single grain which he casts into the furrows shall rise again. But he expects nothing without the use of means; and therefore he does his part; and *that* too as regularly and diligently as if every thing depended on himself. He well knows that God alone can give rain, or cause the sun to shine, or give power to the seed which he has sown to spring up: but still he labours, that he may not fail through any neglect of his own.

Now in this he is a pattern for all Christians. They have their work to do. True, they cannot ensure success: but they know that it is in *the use*, and *not in the neglect*, of the appointed means, that God will bless them: and therefore they are labouring as assiduously as if every thing depended on

themselves. Behold them in secret : they read the Scriptures with diligence: they pray over them with earnestness: they set themselves to mortify their evil propensities, and to fulfil their duties both to God and man. Observe them at all times, and you will see, that they are in earnest for heaven. When you go into the fields, and see the husbandman ploughing, manuring, sowing, harrowing, weeding his ground, you will never hesitate a moment to say, that he has the harvest in view. So, see the Christian from day to day, and you will without fail remark, that he has heaven in view, and that he is preparing for a future harvest.]

2. In a patient expectation of the desired end—

[Many months intervene between the seed-time and the harvest: but the husbandman waits with patience. It is some time before the seed springs up from under the clods: but he waits for it, and for “the former rain,” which alone can call forth its vegetative powers. Its growth is afterwards impeded by drought: but still he waits for the latter rain, without which the corn can never come to maturity. There may be many alternations of hope and fear: but he commits the matter to the Lord, and waits the destined time, in expectation that God will give him to see, in an abundant increase, the fruit of his labours. So the Christian must wait upon his God: many things he will meet with to try his faith and patience: but he must commit them all to the Lord, not doubting but that God will give him “strength according to his day,” and cause “all events to work together for his good.” As the husbandman knows that a few months will bring the appointed harvest; so the Christian knows, that his Lord is quickly coming, and “will not tarry beyond the appointed time:” and for that time he must wait; fully assured, that the harvest which he shall then reap will amply repay all his cares and all his toil.

This then, Christian, is the pattern you are to follow: you must be “steadfast, and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and then you are assured, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How to estimate your true character—

[The Apostle addresses those whom he is exhorting by the endearing name of “brethren:” for they are all children of one common Father, even of God himself. Now, whereinsoever they differ from each other, they all agree in this: the true child of God is engaged in a work, which demands, and in which he puts forth, all his energies. In it he is occupied throughout the year. He consults not the clouds, to know whether he shall plough and sow his ground: he knows

that the work must be done, and he engages in it in a humble dependence on his God: and he looks to the future judgment, as the period when all his labours shall be compensated, and his hopes fulfilled. Now, I would ask, would every one that sees you, know you by these marks? The husbandman, without intending to attract notice, discovers to all, *his* views, *his* occupations, *his* desires. Are *yours* also in like manner apparent to all who behold your life and conversation! Doubtless your daily calls of duty are not so visible to every observer: but upon the whole, the great scope and end of your life is not a whit less visible to all who are round about you. Here then you may easily ascertain your own character. If eternity be not ever in your view; if all you do have not a reference to it; if you be not willing both to do and suffer every thing that may conduce to your future welfare; and if you be not "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ," as to the period for the completion of all your wishes, you do not belong to this holy family: you may call yourselves Christians; but you are not Christians indeed. We read of those who "said that they were Jews, and did lie:" so you say that you are Christians; but your whole conduct gives the lie to your profession. If you are Christians in deed and in truth, "your works of faith, and labours of love, and patience of hope, are known to all;" and they vouch for you, that "you are the elect," the children of the living God^f.]

2. How to anticipate your certain end—

[All imagine that they are going to heaven; and will not be persuaded to the contrary. But, if you have ears to hear, and hearts to understand, you shall know this day whether you are going to heaven or to hell. Ask yonder husbandman: 'Have you been ploughing and sowing your ground this year?' 'No; I have had other things to do.'—'And do you expect a harvest?' 'Yes, I shall have as good a crop as any of my neighbours.'—'But do you think that you shall obtain the end without the means?' 'Tell me not about means and end: others give themselves a great deal of unnecessary trouble: and I shall have as good a crop as my neighbours: nor shall any one persuade me to the contrary.'

Now what, suppose you, will be the issue? Will the event accord with this man's expectations? Will he not, when the time of harvest comes, find that his confidence has been delusive; and that his barns are empty, whilst the granaries of others are filled with store? Then I agree that you shall be your own judges. If you can form a doubt about the issue of that man's confidence, especially when it is repeated for many

^f 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

years together, then I will be content that you shall buoy up yourselves with the hopes of heaven, though you never use any means to obtain it. But if you have no doubt about that man's folly, then see in it a just picture of your own.

Behold then, I declare to all of you, that the means must be used in order to the end. You must repent, "ploughing up your fallow ground," and "sowing in tears" of deep contrition. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour of sinners; and must look to him for "the former and the latter rain," whereby alone the seed of the word can live and grow in your souls. Lastly, you must make it the one labour of your life to prepare for his second coming, that you may give up your account to him with joy and not with grief. If you thus "go on your way weeping, bearing precious seed, you shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you^g:" but if you act not thus, know that you shall reap according to what you sow. "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; whilst he who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^h."]

^g Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

^h Gal. vi. 7, 8.

MMCCCLXXV.

NEARNESS OF JUDGMENT.

Jam. v. 9. *Behold! the Judge standeth before the door.*

OF the Day of Judgment there is frequent mention in the New Testament: and so strongly was the idea of it realized in the minds of the inspired writers, that they conveyed to the Church, unintentionally on their parts, an expectation of its speedy arrival. This arose indeed, in part, from our blessed Lord himself having blended his description of it with a prediction of the judgments which impended over Jerusalem, and which were to be inflicted upon it before that generation should have passed away^a. Yet, when there was no reference to the destruction of the Jewish polity, the language used respecting it was often exceeding strong. St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, thus expresses himself: "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord,

^a Matt. xxiv. 29—35.

that *we who are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord*, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For 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 who 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^b.” We wonder not that some should mistake his meaning, as we find they did, insomuch that, in his next epistle, he was constrained to rectify their misapprehension of his words, and to bring to their recollection, that he had before told them of many important events, which would occur previous to the arrival of that day^c. St. James speaks of that period in terms of similar aspect with those of the Apostle Paul: “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh^d :” and again, “The Judge standeth before the door.” Whether, in these passages, St. James had any reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, I cannot exactly say: it is possible he might; because it would be some consolation to the suffering Christians to know that their oppressors would soon be disarmed of their power: but, beyond a doubt, he chiefly refers to the time appointed for the future judgment; when all the inequalities of this present state will be done away, and every person receive a suitable recompence, according to the injuries he has either inflicted or sustained. In this view, the Apostle says, “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned:” that is, vent not your indignation against an oppressor, no, not even in an inarticulate sound^e, lest the same judgment come on you which you would be ready to inflict on him: but leave the matter to your Almighty “Judge, who standeth before the door,” ready to

^b 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.

^c 2 Thess. ii. 1—5.

^d ver. 8.

^e The word means “groan.” There is a certain vehement, though inarticulate sound, resembling a groan, by which we are apt to express an angry and indignant feeling against one whom we are unable to punish. *This* is the feeling forbidden in the text.

“award tribulation to those who trouble you; but to you, who are troubled, rest^f.”

Let us consider,

I. The truth that is here suggested—

To enter into the full meaning of this awful truth, we must distinctly notice its two leading parts :

1. Death is at hand, to carry us before our Judge—

[This is an undoubted truth. The experience of every day attests it. Death lurks within us; and finds, in the disordered state of our bodies, ten thousand means of accomplishing our destruction. He lies in ambush, too, in every thing around us. There is not any thing which may not prove an instrument in his hands to bring us down. Nor is it by disease or accident alone that he can effect his purpose. In instances without number he inflicts the fatal stroke, without so much as employing any visible or acknowledged agent. If only he receive his commission from God, he is able to work either by means or without means. It need only be said, “This night shall thy soul be required of thee;” and with irresistible power he executes the decree; and transmits us, prepared or unprepared, into the immediate presence of our God.]

2. Our Judge is at hand, to pronounce our deserved doom—

[He is not afar off, that he must be sought after: nor is he so occupied with the cases of others, as not to be at liberty to consider ours. The instant we are brought before him, he is ready to pronounce his sentence. Of this, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a striking illustration. “All is naked and open before him,” at one view; and in one instant of time he can so present every thing before our minds, that we also may discern the equity of his sentence. If at night we wished to see a variety of objects, we must take a light, and view them in succession, one at a time: but if the sun be risen upon the earth, we can see ten thousand objects at once. Thus can the Judge of quick and dead, in one instant of time, present to our view the records of our whole life, to serve as a foundation of the sentence that he shall pass upon us. Some notion of this we may form from the account given us of the Samaritan woman. She had had some conversation with our Lord, who had made known to her one particular circumstance of her life: and with such power was that particular truth

^f 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

accompanied to her soul, that she went home and said, "Come, see a man who has told me all that ever I did^g." Now this omniscient Judge is at the door, ready to pass sentence on us, the very instant we are brought before him: and, if our eyes were opened, as those of Elisha's servant were^h, we might see the throne of judgment already set; the Judge himself seated upon it; the books opened before him; the list of the prisoners, according as they are in succession to be brought before him; and the officers ready, both to summon them in their turn, and to execute on all the sentence awarded to them.]

To impress this solemn truth upon your minds, let me proceed to shew,

II. The attention it demands—

"Behold! the Judge standeth before the door:" mark it; contemplate it; act upon it. Surely the consideration of this awful truth should prevail upon us,

1. To seek without delay the pardon of our past sins—

[If we "die in our sins," woe be to us! "it had been better for us never to have been born." But through repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ all our past sins may be forgiven: they may all "be blotted out, as a morning cloud;" yea, though they may have been of a "scarlet or crimson dye, they may be made white as snow." Should we, then, defer a moment to seek this inestimable blessing? When we know not but that the very next hour we may be summoned into the presence of our Judge, should we endanger the everlasting welfare of our souls by waiting for a more convenient season? Oh! "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him; lest the adversary deliver you to the Judge, and the Judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Verily, you shall not come out thence, till you have paid the utmost farthingⁱ."]]

2. To guard with all diligence against the incursion of fresh sin—

[Remember, that whatever be the state of our souls at the moment of death, that will continue to be our state to all eternity. It may be said, "I have repented long since, and sought for mercy through Christ, and attained to a considerable measure of righteousness." Be it so. Yet must I declare unto you, that "if you relapse into sin, your past righteousness

^g John iv. 29.

^h 2 Kings vi. 17.

ⁱ Matt. v. 25, 26.

shall not be remembered; but in the iniquity which you have committed, shall you die^k." There cannot be a more fatal error, than to imagine that your past experience, whatever it may have been, shall avail you any thing, if you turn back to sin. So far will it be from screening you from the wrath of God, that it will rather render you obnoxious to it, in a ten-fold heavier degree: "You only have I known of all the families of Israel; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities^l." Hear how strongly God himself has cautioned you against this error: "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^m." When, therefore, you consider how suddenly you may be called into the presence of your Judge, it becomes you to "keep your garments clean," and to "use all diligence that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."]

3. To watch in a more especial manner over the secret workings of your hearts—

[It is not our actions only that our God will call into judgment, but "every secret thing, whether it be good or evil." There is much that is externally "good in the eyes of men, which yet is an abomination in the sight of Godⁿ." There may be in the best exercises of our religion much of pride and self-complacency; and in our most benevolent actions, also, a mixture of ostentation and vanity. Now "God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart^o." How attentive then should we be to the secret workings of our minds! They are all discerned by God, as clearly as our overt acts: "He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins:" "he weigheth the very spirits of men:" and thousands, who took credit to themselves for acting from the best of principles, will be found no better than hypocrites before him. Beloved, know of a truth, that if ever you would find acceptance with your Judge, you must be "Israelites indeed, and without guile."]

4. To improve for your good every summons which is sent to those around us—

[You see in the circumstances now before you a striking illustration of our text^p — — — And does not this event

^k Ezek. xxxiii. 13, 18. ^l Amos. iii. 2. ^m Gal. vi. 7, 8.

ⁿ Luke xvi. 15. ^o 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^p Here the particular circumstances of the *person's death*—if it be on account of an individual, or of the *epidemic sickness*, if that be the occasion—may be entered into at large.

speak to you? What if *you* had been the person summoned into the presence of your Judge: were you prepared to meet him? Would he have found you truly penitent for all your past transgressions; and watchful against every sin, yea, against every degree of evil, even in thought or desire? If not, what would have been your feelings at this moment? — — — Do you not tremble at the thought? Or, suppose that this night a similar summons should be sent to you, (and you have no security that there will not,) are you ready? Do not trifle, my beloved brethren, on the very brink of eternity: but “stand with your loins girt, and your lamps trimmed, as servants waiting for the coming of your Lord.” Then, “whether your Lord come in the morning, or in the evening, or at the cock-crowing, or at midnight,” it shall be well with you. In a word, learn to “die daily:” and then it will be a joy to you to reflect, that your Judge is at the door: for the door at which he stands shall no sooner be opened to summon you into his presence, than angels, as his ministering servants, shall bear you from his tribunal to the realms of bliss.]

MMCCCLXXVI.

THE PATIENCE OF JOB.

Jam. v. 11. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*

ONE of the most singular ideas that can be suggested to a carnal mind, is that which occurs in the words immediately preceding the text; “We count them happy that endure.” An ungodly man sees, that it is better to bear afflictions patiently than to sink under them; but he can scarcely conceive how afflictions, under any circumstances, can become a ground of congratulation. This difficulty, however, is solved by taking into the account “the end” of those afflictions: and it admits of easy illustration from the case of Job.

In prosecuting the Apostle’s view of this subject, we shall consider,

I. The patience of Job under his afflictions—

Great and unparalleled were the afflictions of Job—

[The destruction of all his property, and all his servants, by bands of robbers, and by lightning, announced to him as it was in three different accounts, by different messengers in speedy succession, would of itself have been sufficient to overwhelm his mind, if he had not been endued with uncommon fortitude; since by this he was reduced in a moment from the height of opulence and grandeur to the lowest indigence and want^a.

But, distressing as these events were, what an inconceivable aggravation must they have received from the tidings delivered by a fourth messenger, the sudden death of all his children! Had he heard of only one child dying, and that by any natural disorder, it would, to such a parent, have been a fearful addition to all his other burdens: but to hear of seven sons, and three daughters, all crushed in a moment by the falling of his house^b, if it did not bereave him of his senses, we might well expect, that it should, at least, draw forth some murmuring, and unadvised expressions.

To all these calamities were added yet others, that affected more immediately his own person; and which, in such a conjuncture, must be beyond measure afflictive. Satan, having permission to try him to the uttermost, smote him from head to foot with the most lothesome ulcers, insomuch that he was constrained to sit down among the ashes, and to scrape himself with a potsherd^c.

In the midst of all this trouble one might hope that he would have some comfort in the kind offices of neighbours, the compassion of friends, and the tender assiduities of his wife. But, alas! his servants turned their backs upon him^d: the children in the streets despised and mocked him^e: the very friends who came to comfort him, loaded him with the most unfounded accusations, and asserted, that his sufferings were indications of peculiar wickedness, which God was now disclosing and punishing^f. His wife also derided his affiance in God, and counselled him to renounce it utterly, yea, to "curse God, and die^g."

Take any one of these trials separately, and it was great: but view them collectively, and they exceeded all that ever were endured by mortal man.]

They served however to call forth his most unrivalled patience—

[Mark his conduct when informed of all his accumulated misfortunes, and especially the loss of all his children: "Then

^a Job i. 13—17.

^b Job i. 18, 19.

^c Job ii. 7, 8.

^d Job xix. 15, 16.

^e Job xix. 18.

^f Passim.

^g Job ii. 9.

Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped; and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord^h."

Behold him yet again after his body was so smitten, and when his wife gave him that desperate, that atheistical, advice: all was meekness still: his very reproof was mild, though firm: "He said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Thus "in all this he never once charged God foolishly, or sinned in the least respectⁱ."

It is true that, after this, we find him "cursing the day of his birth," and uttering some unwarranted expressions against God: nor would it become us either to conceal, or to extenuate, his guilt in these respects. Our blessed Lord alone was *absolutely* without sin. But though Job betrayed his infirmity in some hasty words, yet, on the whole, his argument was right in opposition to that of his friends: and God himself, as the arbiter of the dispute, declared, that "they had not spoken the thing that was right as his servant Job had^k." Moreover, the deep humility with which he acknowledged his offence, proved his title to the character which God had given him in the beginning, that he was the most perfect and upright of the sons of men^l.]

Having taken this view of Job's afflictions, and of his patience under them, let us consider,

II. The design which God had in them—

We, who behold every part of this mysterious dispensation in one view, are enabled, from its catastrophe, to mark the design of God in every intermediate step of the plot: we see what God intended, by what he actually effected.

1. He confounded Satan—

[Satan had accused Job as a hypocrite, who, if he were brought into trying circumstances, would even curse God to his face: and he undertook to prove him such a character, if God would only suffer him to make the trial. God gave him this permission^m, and thereby afforded Satan an occasion to prove himself a liar, and to demonstrate that integrity, the existence of which he was so forward to deny.

^h Job i. 20, 21.

ⁱ Job i. 22. and ii. 10.

^k Job xlii. 7.

^l Job i. 8. and ii. 3.

^m Job i. 9—12. and ii. 4—6.

Nor is this a small consolation to the people of God, whom Satan is ever ready to accuse and harass. When he would persuade them that they are hypocrites, they may recollect, that "he was a liar from the beginning." When he, through Divine permission, assaults them either in body or mind, they may look back to this history, and see, that he can in no respect exceed his commission, or overthrow those who trust in God. He may toss them vehemently as in a sieve; but shall never destroy the smallest grain of solid wheatⁿ.]

2. He exercised and improved the graces of Job—

[If "men do not light a candle, in order to put it under a bushel, but that it may give light to those who are in the house^o," we may be sure that God does not implant his grace in the heart, but with a view to call it into exercise. Now he had endued Job with such eminent patience, that the common events of life were not sufficient to call it forth: he therefore suffered Satan to exert all his power against him, in order that Job's piety might be displayed, augmented, and confirmed. Behold the sufferer when coming out of his trial; how bright does he shine, when "abasing himself in dust and ashes!" How eminent does he appear, when God himself not only takes his part, but refuses forgiveness to his uncharitable friends, except as an answer to his intercession for them^p! Truly he lost nothing in the furnace but his dross; and "he came out of it purified as gold^q."]]

3. He increased Job's happiness both in this and in the eternal world—

[Doubtless the afflictions of Job were inexpressibly severe: yet was he no stranger to consolation even in his most distressing hours. If all his earthly comforts were dead, and he had lost all hope of happiness on this side the grave, still he saw that he had a Redeemer living; and he knew that the day was fast approaching, when he should enjoy an intimate and everlasting communion with him^r.

But beyond all expectation he was raised from his low estate; his family was again increased to the very number he had before lost; his possessions were doubled; and his life, which probably at that time was somewhat advanced, was prolonged a hundred and forty years, that he might see his posterity even to the fourth generation^s. We must confess, therefore, that even in this life he was abundantly recompensed for the months of trouble that he had endured.

ⁿ Luke xxii. 31. with Amos ix. 9.

^o Matt. v. 15.

^p Job xlii. 8. ^q Job xxiii. 10.

^r Job xix. 25—27.

^s Job xlii. 10, 13, 16.

How much his eternal happiness was affected by it, it is impossible for us to say: but sure we are that his affliction was the means of greatly augmenting it. In this view, affliction was better to him than heaven itself would have been: for, if he had been removed to heaven at once, his state, though glorious, would have been for ever fixed: whereas his affliction was "*working for him*" as long as it continued: it was every moment increasing that weight of glory which he was to possess for ever^t. Who does not see that it would be better for a man to be cut off and be cast into hell immediately, than to live only to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath^u?" for though his torments would come upon him a little sooner, yet the respite of a few months, or years, would bear no proportion to the increased weight of misery that he must eternally endure. And exactly thus the additional weight of glory which Job will eternally possess, will far overbalance the trials he suffered, or the short period of bliss, which, by an earlier removal, he might have enjoyed.]

To make the just improvement of this history, we must notice,

III. The general character of God, as it is exhibited in this particular dispensation—

This seems to be the more immediate object, to which St. James would direct our attention. Persons in the midst of their trouble are apt to entertain hard thoughts of God: but we who, in this instance, "have seen *the end* of the Lord," may rest assured "that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," however dark or painful his dispensations towards us may be. It is by love alone he is actuated,

1. In sending afflictions—

[He does "not willingly afflict his people^x." He knows what we stand in need of; and he sends it for our good. He chastises us, not as earthly parents too often do, to indulge their own evil tempers, but purely "for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness^y." And as he knows what we want, so he knows what we can bear; and will take care either to apportion our burden to our strength^z, or to give us strength sufficient for our trials^a. Besides, in all our afflictions he sympathizes with us^b; he watches over us with the

^t 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^u Rom. ii. 5.

^x Lam. iii. 33.

^y Heb. xii. 10.

^z 1 Cor. x. 13.

^a Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^b Isai. lxiii. 9.

care of a refiner^c, and the solicitude of a parent^d: and when he sees that his rod has produced its desired effect, he is glad to return to us in the endearments of love, and to confirm our confidence in him by the sweetest tokens of reconciliation and acceptance^e.]

2. In multiplying afflictions—

[When our troubles, like those of Job, are many and various, we are ready to conclude that they are sent in wrath. But it is not for us to prescribe how many, or of what continuance, our afflictions shall be. We must consider God as a physician, who prescribes with unerring wisdom, and consults the benefit, rather than the inclination, of his patients. We must “walk by faith, and not by sight:” it will be time enough hereafter to see the reasons of God’s procedure^f. Job was induced at last to account God his enemy: and they who beheld the afflictions of Christ, were ready to say, that “he was judicially stricken, and smitten of God” as the most abandoned of mankind^g. But we know that, as Job was, so was Christ, beloved of the Father; and never more beloved than when crying in the depths of his dereliction, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Let not any then “write bitter things against themselves” on account of the greatness of their afflictions, but rather accept their trials as tokens of his love; for, “whom he loveth he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth^h.”]

ADVICE—

1. Let none be secure, as though affliction were far off from them—

[We may be to-day in affluence; to-morrow in want: to-day in health; to-morrow languishing on a bed of sickness: to-day enjoying the society of wife, or children; to-morrow lamenting their loss. Let us remember, that whatever we have is *God’s*; it is only lent us for a little while, to be recalled at any hour he shall see fit. Let us learn to hold every thing as by this tenure, that we may be ready at any moment to give up whatever he shall be pleased to require of us. Since “we know not what a day may bring forth,” we should stand girt for the service of our God, ever ready to do or suffer his righteous will.]

2. Let none be hasty in their judgments, when called to suffer—

^c Mal. iii. 3.

^d Ps. ciii. 13.

^e Jer. xxxi. 20.

^f John xiii. 7.

^g Isai. liii. 4.

^h Heb. xii. 6.

[Jacob thought all his trials were *against* him; when, in fact, they were designed for the good of himself and of all his familyⁱ. And we know not but that the events we so deeply bewail, are indispensably necessary to our salvation. We have reason to think that, if we saw *the end* as God does, we, instead of regarding our losses or bereavements as afflictions, should adore God for them as much as for the most pleasing of his dispensations. Let us then wait till he shall have discovered to us the whole of his designs; and be content to form our judgment of him when all the grounds of judging are laid before us.]

ⁱ Gen. xlii. 36. with xlv. 5, 7. and l. 20.

MMCCCLXXVII.

THE EFFICACY OF FERVENT PRAYER.

Jam. v. 16. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

PRAYER and intercession are generally considered as *duties*: but, if viewed aright, they would rather be regarded as *privileges*; seeing that they are the means of obtaining for ourselves and others those blessings which no created being can bestow. In this point of view, the passage before us, together with the preceding context, affords us the greatest possible encouragement. It is to be regretted, however, that instead of making a due improvement of these gracious declarations, the Papists have made use of them chiefly, if not solely, to advance the temporal interests of their clergy, at the expense of the eternal welfare of the laity.

On the direction given to “pray over a sick person, and to anoint him with oil *in order to his recovery*,” they have founded an ordinance, to be observed when a man is absolutely *past recovery*: and that which was designed of God as *emblematic* only of a *miraculous power*, given *at that time* for the restoration of *bodily health*, they have established as

^a ver. 14, 15. The forgiveness of sin here mentioned refers only to the removal of any particular judgment that had been inflicted on account of sin. See John v. 14. and 1 Cor. xi. 30.

the *essential* means in all ages of saving the immortal soul.

Again ; Because the saints are encouraged to “confess their faults one to another,” with a view to the augmenting of their mutual sympathy, and the directing of them in their mutual intercessions^b, these deceivers have required the laity to confess their sins to the clergy, in order to their obtaining the forgiveness of them at the hands of God : whereas, according to St. James, there is no such deference due to any particular order of men ; but the confession is as much required from the clergy to the laity, as from the laity to the clergy.

We stop not however to notice these grievous errors, but pass on to that which more immediately concerns ourselves ; and to point out to you,

I. The import of the assertion before us—

The preceding context certainly leads our thoughts *chiefly* to the work of intercession : yet since it is also said, “Is any afflicted, let him pray^c,” we must not confine our attention to prayer as offered for others, but must notice it also as offered for ourselves. We say then, that when “a righteous man” draws nigh to God, and presents before him prayers inspired and dictated by the Holy Ghost (whose peculiar office it is to “help our infirmities” in prayer^d, and to “make intercession for us^e”), he shall prevail ;

1. For others—

[Of this the instances are so numerous, that we can only give a short specimen of them : yet shall it be such a specimen, as will abundantly confirm the truth before us.

We will begin with Moses, who, when God was exceedingly wroth with his people for making and worshipping the golden calf, set himself to pray and intercede for them. But God, feeling, if I may so say, how impossible it would be for him to resist the importunity of his servant, said, “Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them : and,” if thou thinkest that my covenant with Abraham will be broken thereby, I assure thee it shall

^b ver. 16.

^c ver. 13.

^d Rom. viii. 26.

^e Rom. viii. 27.

not; for "I will make of thee a great nation^f." But Moses would not "let him alone," but pleaded for them with all imaginable earnestness and importunity: and the consequence was, "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people^g."

My next instance shall be that of Joshua, who, desiring to prosecute the advantage which he had gained over the Amorites, and destroy them utterly, prayed that neither the sun nor moon might advance in their course, but continue to aid him with their light, till he had accomplished his desire. To effect this, the whole universe must be arrested in its career; and such a shock be given to it, as to endanger its utter dissolution. But whatever stood in the way, it must yield to his prayer. Accordingly, no sooner did this righteous man issue the command, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon," than all the laws of nature were suspended, "and the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, till the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it, or after it, that the Lord so hearkened to the voice of a man^h."

Here we have seen all the material creation stopped by the voice of prayer.—Now we will refer to another instance, wherein heaven itself is moved, and an angel sent from thence to fulfil the petitions of two chosen servants. Jerusalem was besieged, and utterly incapable of holding out against the enemy who was come against it. But Hezekiah and Isaiah betook themselves to prayer. And what was the result? An angel was sent from heaven to destroy, in one single night, one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the besieging army: and the blaspheming monarch, who had boasted that nothing could withstand him, was forced to return immediately to his own country, where he was slain by his own sons, whilst in the very act of worshipping the senseless idol in which he had trusted for success. For this cause, says the historian, "Hezekiah the king, and the Prophet Isaiah the son of Amos, prayed and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the swordⁱ."

One more instance I will mention, in order to shew how immediately the prayer of a righteous man succeeds. Daniel

^f Exod. xxxii. 10.

^h Josh. x. 12—14.

^g Exod. xxxii. 14.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxxii. 20, 21.

had understood, from the prophecies of Jeremiah, that the time for the close of the Babylonish captivity was near at hand: and he set himself to seek more particular instruction from God respecting it, in order that he might be able to take advantage of such circumstances as might occur for the benefit of his nation. "I set my face," says he, "unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God." And now behold the effect!—"And *whiles I was speaking and praying*, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, *while I was speaking in prayer*, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation, and informed me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding: *at the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth*; and I am come to shew thee all that thou didst ask^k." See what expedition was used, by God's special command, to answer whilst in the very act of prayer; and to let him know, that, at the very commencement of his suit, his prayer was heard!

More on this subject is unnecessary: yet less could scarcely have been spoken, if we would in any degree do justice to it.]

2. For ourselves—

[I mention this last, because it is, in reality, the greatest: for the prayers which are offered in behalf of others, prevail only for the obtaining of some temporal blessing: they cannot certainly procure for men the salvation of their souls: for, if they could, no creature would ever perish. When Stephen prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," it prevailed probably in behalf of Saul, and perhaps of some others: but it cannot be supposed that it succeeded in behalf of all. But for a man's own self his prayer is sure to prevail. There is no limit to the benefits which he shall receive, provided only he ask according to the will of God. He may not be answered in the particular way that he may desire. The cup, for the removal of which the Lord Jesus Christ himself prayed, was not taken out of his hands; nor was the thorn for the extraction of which St. Paul cried with such eager importunity removed: but both he and his divine Master were answered in a way more consonant with the purposes of Jehovah. But in some way, and *that* the best, prayer shall most assuredly be answered to all who cry to God in sincerity and truth^l.

^k Dan. ix. 3, 4, 20—23.

^l Jer. xxix. 13

Whatever they ask in Christ's name, shall be given them^m. Let them "open their mouth ever so wide, it shall be filledⁿ." They may exhaust all the powers of language in their petitions, and may then extend their thoughts to the utmost limit of a finite conception; and they shall not only have all, but more than all, yea, "abundantly above all that they can ask or think^o."]

The assertion in our text deserves the most attentive consideration on its own account; but more especially on account of,

II. The insight which it gives us into truths of the greatest importance—

From this we obtain an insight into,

1. The character of God—

[We think of God, for the most part, as a Being of infinite majesty, who, unless in matters of very extraordinary moment, does not trouble himself with the concerns of men: and hence, if a person were to speak of having received answers to his prayers, he would be accounted wild, visionary, and presumptuous. But let God be viewed as he is represented in the text: let him be viewed as noticing with the deepest interest the very least and meanest of his children; as attending to their every cry, and treasuring up in his vials their every tear^p. Not so much as a "breathing" of theirs escapes his notice; or a desire, of which they themselves perhaps are scarcely conscious^q. The highest archangel does not more engage his attention, than does a poor despised Lazarus: nor is he less concerned about every individual amongst his people, than if there were but one in the whole universe. This is the true light in which to view his condescension and grace; of which a mother's feelings towards her first-born child afford but a slender and very inadequate idea^r.]

2. The Christian's state—

[In respect of external appearance, there is no difference between a child of God and any other person: but in reality, as they are viewed by God, they are widely dissimilar. In the one God beholds his own image: in the other, the image of the wicked one. On the one he looks with pleasure and complacency: the other he views afar off, with utter disdain^s. To

^m John xiv. 13, 14. and xv. 7. and xvi. 23. and 1 John iii. 22. and v. 14, 15.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^o Eph. iii. 20.

^p Ps. lvi. 8.

^q Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. Lam. iii. 56.

^r Isai. xlix. 15.

^s Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

the one his ears are open, to hear their every request^t: “the sacrifices of the other are an abomination to him^u.” Look at Abraham, when interceding for Sodom: there you see the friend of God. Look at those who, merely under the pressure of some calamity, cry and plead for help, whilst yet they have no love to God in their hearts: there you see the contrast; for God “laughs at their calamity, and mocks at their fear^x.” And all this is but a prelude to that which will speedily be accomplished in them; when the one shall be called to his right hand, and be exalted to a throne of glory; and the other be turned to his left hand, and be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Ungodly men endeavour to persuade themselves that all this is nothing but a vain conceit: but the Jews, notwithstanding all their blindness, could see that this difference did exist: “*We know,*” say they, “that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth^y.” Do ye then know it: for, whether ye will believe it, or not, so it is: nor are light and darkness, Christ and Belial, heaven and hell, further asunder, than are the children of God, and the children of the wicked one^z.]

3. The use and excellency of the Gospel—

[It is the Gospel alone that can bring a man into this happy state. Nothing else can shew him how to draw nigh to God with acceptance, or to obtain reconciliation with him. This exhibits to us a Saviour; a Saviour, who bought us with his blood. This brings us into union with that Saviour, so that we are made “one spirit with him^a,” and are entitled to a participation of all that he himself possesses; “of the love wherewith the Father loveth him^b,” of “the joy with which his soul is filled^c,” and “of the glory which the Father hath given to him^d.” Here is the true secret of the difference of which we have before spoken. The believer is viewed as in Christ; as washed in his blood; as clothed in his righteousness; as altogether “one with him, even as the Father and Christ are one^e.” This accounts for all which we have before mentioned of the believer’s peculiar and exalted privileges. Let me then entreat you, beloved, to embrace the Gospel without delay; seeing that through that alone you can have access to God, and obtain that fellowship with him which it is your privilege to enjoy.]

TO CONCLUDE—

^t Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16.

^y John ix. 31.

^b John xvii. 23.

^c John xvii. 21.

^u Prov. xv. 8.

^z 2 Cor. vi. 14—16.

^c John xvii. 13.

^x Prov. i. 24—28.

^a 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^d John xvii. 22.

[Bear in mind to whom these privileges belong: they belong exclusively to "the righteous man." The ungodly and the hypocrite have no part in them. Seek then to attain the character of the righteous: seek it by faith in the Lord Jesus; "by whose obedience you shall be made righteous^f," and by whose all-powerful grace you shall "be renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness^g." Then shall all these blessings be yours. You shall be "a people near unto God^h:" yea, you shall "have power with God, and shall prevailⁱ" in all your supplications: even for others you shall prevail to a great extent, but for yourselves you shall obtain all the blessings both of grace and glory.]

^f Rev. v. 19.

^g Eph. iv. 24.

^h Ps. cxlviii. 14.

ⁱ Hos. xii. 4.

MMCCCLXXVIII.

CONVERSION OF A SINNER A GREAT BENEFIT.

Jam. v. 19, 20. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

IN the apostolic age, the power of working miracles was vouchsafed to many; and was much coveted, not only on account of the benefit which it enabled its possessor to impart, but on account of the honour which it brought to him that exercised it. That power has long since been withdrawn, it being no longer necessary for the support and credit of the Christian cause. Nor need we regret its discontinuance; since there is yet communicated to every true Christian a power of infinitely greater value; namely, a power to instruct and save the souls of men. We cannot any longer by the prayer of faith save the sick, and raise him up from the bed of sickness, and remove the judgments that have been inflicted on him on account of his sins^a: but by instructing a sinner, and turning him from the error of his sins, we can now, no less than in the apostolic age, save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins. The miraculous power was in the hands of

^a ver. 14, 15.

few, even of "the elders of the Church;" but this spiritual power, as my text intimates, is common to all, and is to be exercised by all.

From hence we see,

I. Our duty towards our erring brethren—

There are still, as formerly, many, who, whilst they are called Christians, do materially "err from the truth"—

[No one can read this epistle without seeing that very awful errors obtained in the Church, both in relation to faith and practice: and no one can know any thing of the Christian world, and not know, that Christianity amongst them is little more than a name. The very way of salvation, simple as it is, is very little understood. There is scarcely any one who is not expecting to be saved in whole, or in part, by some works of his own. The generality imagine that their repentance and reformation are to recommend them to God: and even those who acknowledge their obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ for what he has done and suffered for them, yet hope to obtain *an interest in Him* by their good works, or *acceptance on account of their works* through him. The simple life of faith is but little known: and frequently but little experienced, even where in terms the necessity of it is acknowledged.

The same may be said of men's practice also. Look at the life and conduct of the whole Christian world, and say, what resemblance you see in it to the life of Christ. Christians are said to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." But what more would you learn of the mind and will of Christ, from what you see in the Christian world, than from what you might find in the better sort of heathens? In the Lord Jesus Christ there was an entire superiority to the world: but in his professed followers you see an entire subjection to it. In the Lord Jesus Christ you find that "it was his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father:" but in his professed followers you will see no such effort, no such determination to serve and honour God. Let all of you, who are here present, look at *their own* principles, and *their own* practice, and see whether they are founded altogether upon God's revealed will, and altogether conformed to the pattern set before them in the Scriptures. The more candidly these matters be inquired into, the more clearly will you see, that the great mass of nominal Christians are "erring from the truth," and need to "be converted from the error of their ways."]

Towards these our duty is to use all possible means for their conversion—

[We are not all called to take upon us the ministerial office: but we all in our respective circles should exert ourselves for the edification of those around us. No man is at liberty "to put his light under a bed, or under a bushel:" no man is at liberty to ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Would any man, who should see a house on fire, be justified in saying, 'It is no concern of mine?' or, if the inhabitants were burnt to death through his unconcern, would there be a creature upon earth that would not execrate him for his inhumanity? Much more therefore, if we see immortal souls "erring from the truth," and hastening to destruction, should we be inexcusable, if we neglected to warn them of their danger, and to shew them how their souls might be saved alive. We should warn those who are living in a wilful neglect of God: we should declare to them their guilt and danger: we should set before them what the Scriptures have spoken respecting "the death of the soul," and should entreat them to "flee from the wrath to come." In particular, we should, as far as our capacity admits of it, open to them "the truth as it is in Jesus." We should make known to them the wonders of redeeming love: we should set the Lord Jesus Christ before them in all his endearing qualities; and shew them how "able, and willing, he is to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." We should encourage them to believe in him; and, by the holy violence of argument and entreaty, should "compel them" to accept his gracious invitations, and to sit down as guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb. In a word, we should do our utmost to enlighten, convert, and save their souls.]

That we may the more readily engage in this duty, let us consider,

II. Our encouragement to perform it—

We may doubtless find much of our labour to be in vain. But, if in any single instance we succeed,

1. We shall "save a soul from death"—

[Unconverted sinners, whatever they may imagine, are hastening to death: for the "wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and the soul that sinneth, it shall die. And let not any one imagine, that this death consists in a mere annihilation: no; the soul, as to its existence, shall never die: but it will endure a misery of which we can form no conception, a torment in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is called in Scripture "the second death." From this however, if we are made the happy instruments of converting a soul to God, we deliver it. What a wonderful thought is this! to deliver a soul from

“everlasting burnings!” If we laboured throughout our whole lives, and succeeded but in one instance to accomplish our desire, how richly should we be recompensed! What if the great mass of those whose welfare we had sought, had derided us as weak enthusiasts? the thought of saving one soul from everlasting perdition would compensate all the obloquy that ever could be cast upon us. The truth is, we can form no idea what it must be to spend eternity in weeping and wailing and gnashing our teeth in the regions of despair, and under the wrath of an offended God. But, if we could form any conception of it, we should need no other inducement to labour day and night in endeavours to guide men into the way of truth, and to save their souls alive.]

2. We shall hide a multitude of sins—

[Who can ever count the sins of an unconverted soul? Yet shall they all be hidden, hidden from the sight of Almighty God, “out of the book of whose remembrance they shall be blotted,” and from before whose face they shall pass away “as a morning cloud:” yea, God himself will “cast them behind his back into the very depths of the sea,” and “will remember them against the sinner no more.” Hear the declaration of God upon this subject: “The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve^b.”

Now consider this: consider an immortal soul laden with iniquities more numerous and weighty than the sands upon the sea-shore; and liberated from its burthen through your offices of love! Methinks, the most distant hope of conferring such a benefit is enough to turn you all into heralds and ambassadors of the Most High God. Yet let me not be misunderstood. It is not to the office of *public* instructors that I would call you; for *that* should be undertaken by none but those who are called to it by God himself: but to the office of *private* instructors, I would invite you; and would urge you with all importunity to engage in it: for *it is not of ministers that the Apostle speaks in my text, but of private Christians; every one of whom he encourages to engage in this labour of love, saying, “LET HIM KNOW, whoever he be that converts a sinner from the error of his ways, LET HIM KNOW, that he saves a soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins.”]*

SEE then, beloved,

1. What is the true end of the ministry—

[The whole world is out of course: all are erring from the fold of Christ, and wandering like sheep that know not

^b Jer. l. 20.

how or whither to return. That they may not irremediably perish, God has appointed ministers, to go forth, as under shepherds, to search out the wandering sheep, and to bring them back to his fold. This is the one object of our lives; to shew you how far you "have erred from the truth;" to convert you from the error of your ways; and thus eventually to save your souls. In our execution of this office we perhaps appear to some to be uncharitable and harsh. But if we do believe that death, even the death of your immortal souls, will be the end of your wanderings, does it not become us "to lift up our voice like a trumpet, and to shew to the house of Israel their sins" with all fidelity? Suppose a person taking the soundings of a ship in full sail, were to find, on a sudden, that the ship were running upon rocks or shoals, and would speedily, if the helm were not instantly turned, be irremediably lost; would he not feel it his duty to apprise the pilot of his danger? or would the passengers, whose lives were in such imminent peril, be offended with him, if he spake as one who believed what he said, and as one who had the safety of the crew at heart? Methinks, if there were somewhat of vehemence in his words and manner, all would readily excuse it; and not excuse it only, but applaud it also, as the proper effect of fidelity and love. Then consider us as placed in that situation by Almighty God. You are all embarked on board the vessel, and we are appointed by God to take the soundings: and we do declare unto you, that, unless your course be changed, you must inevitably and eternally perish. If you doubt it, take the line in your own hands, and examine the chart by which you are to steer. We do not wish you to take our word, but to see and judge for yourselves: and, if our testimony be true according to the written word, then be thankful for our labours; and, instead of being offended at our fidelity, adore your God, who has appointed us "to watch for your souls," and has connected our welfare with yours: for it is only by a faithful discharge of our duty to you that "we can save ourselves, or them that hear us^c."]

2. What should be your view in attending on the ordinances of the Gospel—

[You should not come to be amused, but to be instructed and edified. You should come desirous of knowing wherein you have erred, and how you may get safely into the way of truth. Your minds should be open to conviction. You should be aware of the danger of self-deception. You should beg of God to instruct his ministers how to speak most to your edification; and should entreat him to accompany the word

^c 1 Tim. iv. 16.

with power from on high, and to render it effectual for the salvation of your souls. You should bear in mind, that, "though Paul should plant, and Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase;" and you should judge of your profiting, not by the pleasure with which you heard, but by the insight which you have gained into the evils of your own heart, and the ability that has been imparted to rectify your errors. As God in the appointment of ordinances seeks the conversion of your souls, so should you in attending on them; "receiving with meekness the engrafted word," and praying that, as it is able, so also it may be effectual, to save your souls alive^d.]

3. What should be the one object of your whole lives—

[What is there of any importance, compared with the salvation of the soul? I do not hesitate to say, that the care of the soul is the "one thing needful." If there were no future state, men might go on in their own ways without much concern. But, when there is an eternity awaiting us,—an eternity, either of happiness in heaven, or of misery in hell; when our destination to the one or other of these depends entirely on our conduct in this present life; and when no man knows that he has another day to live; I see not how any doubt can exist in the mind of a rational being, that the care of his soul should infinitely outweigh all the concerns of time and sense. True it is, that when men act according to this truth, they are derided as enthusiasts: but there is no man who, in his deliberate judgment, does not see, that "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom." Regard not then the scoffs of foolish and ungodly men; all of whom, if not in this life, yet in the next at least, will applaud your wisdom. As for the angels, they, though in the very presence of their God, will not be so occupied with the glories of heaven, but they will have their joys augmented when they shall behold you turning into wisdom's ways. I pray you then to be in earnest about the salvation of your souls. If God has appointed an order of men on purpose to promote your welfare, and has suspended their salvation on their fidelity to you, and has taught them to consider success in one single instance as a rich recompence for the labour of their whole lives, surely it does not become you to be careless and indifferent. I pray you, awake to a sense of your condition: think how great a work you have to do, and how short and uncertain is the time wherein you have to do it: and now, ere it be too late, "turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"]

^d Jam. i. 21.

1 P E T E R.

MMCCCLXXIX.

OFFICES OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

1 Pet. i. 1, 2. *Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ : grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

CONTEMPTIBLE as Christians often appear in the eyes of men, they are of high estimation in the sight of God. Many glorious descriptions are given of them in the inspired volume : but in no part of it have we more exalted views of them than in the words before us ; where, at the same time that they are represented as treated by man with all manner of cruelties and indignities, they are spoken of as most dear to every person in the Godhead, having been elected by God the Father, redeemed by the Lord Jesus, and sanctified by the operations of the Holy Ghost. This is a great mystery,—the union of the Sacred Three in the redemption and salvation of fallen man. But the consideration of this mystery is of peculiar importance ; not only as establishing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but as shewing the connexion of that doctrine with every part of our salvation ; which originates with God the Father, is carried on by God the Son, and is perfected by God the Holy Ghost.

Let us, under a deep sense of our own ignorance, and with a humble dependence upon God for his guidance and direction, proceed to a calm, dispassionate, and candid consideration of this all-important subject.

I. The Father elects—

The doctrine of election is here, as in many other passages, plainly asserted—

[Christians are “elect, according to the foreknowledge of God.” By “the foreknowledge of God” I understand, God’s infallible discernment of future things, how contingent soever they may appear to us. That he possesses this perfection is unquestionable: for if he did not, how could he ever have inspired his prophets to foretell such distant and improbable events? It is not possible to read the life of our Lord, and to compare the predictions concerning him with the events by which they were fulfilled, and not to say, “Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world^a.” Indeed a man who denies this truth must “think God to be even such an one as himself,” ignorant of the future, and made wiser by the occurrences of every succeeding day;—a supposition from which the mind revolts with utter abhorrence.

Considering then the foreknowledge of God as comprising every thing relating to the salvation of man, we are constrained to view all that relates to man’s salvation as ordained of God. For though we may easily distinguish *in idea* between foreknowledge and fore-ordination, we cannot separate them *in fact*; since if God foreknow every thing, he foreknows it, not as probable, but as certain; and *therefore* certain, because it has been fore-ordained by him “before the foundation of the world,” and is “wrought by him in time according to the counsel of his own will^b.”

Hence to God’s electing love we refer all the grace and mercy that we have ever experienced; and thankfully acknowledge, that “by the grace of God we are what we are^c,” and that, if ever we be saved at all, it will be, “not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace which were given us in Christ Jesus before the world began^d.”]

The objections which are usually brought against this doctrine, by no means disprove its truth—

[Many affirm, that, *if the doctrine of election be true, that of reprobation, of absolute reprobation, must be true also.* In

^a Acts xv. 8.

^b Eph. i. 4, 11.

^c 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^d 2 Tim. i. 9.

answer to this, I would say, that we know nothing, either of the one or of the other, but from the revelation which God has given us; and that, if that revelation affirm the one and deny the other, we must receive that which it affirms, and reject that which it denies. That it does deny the doctrine of absolute reprobation, I think is clear as the light itself. If when Almighty God swears by his own life and immortal perfections, that “he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;” and then founds on that oath this gracious invitation, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel^e?” I am constrained to say, that the doctrine of absolute reprobation, that is, of God’s forming any persons with an express determination to destroy them, irrespectively of any works of theirs, cannot be true. But must I therefore deny the doctrine of election, which the whole Scriptures uniformly assert, merely because I know not how to reconcile the two opinions? Surely not. My sentiments are formed on *Scripture*, and *not on the fallible deductions of human reason*: and if *I* cannot reconcile the two, it is no reason that *God* cannot. *I* cannot reconcile the existence of sin with the holiness of God: but do I therefore deny, or doubt, either the one or the other? Certainly not; so neither do I doubt God’s exercise of sovereign grace towards his elect, because my weak and fallible reason would be ready to connect with it an arbitrary decree against the non-elect. Sure I am, that the Judge of all the earth will do right; and that, whilst all the saved will ascribe their salvation simply and solely to the grace of God, there will not be found one amongst those who perish, who will not confirm God’s sentence of condemnation upon him, saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments^f.”

Another objection against this doctrine is, That *the elect will be saved, though they never should strive at all; and the non-elect will perish, however earnestly they may strive*. But God has united the end with the means: and to attempt to separate them will be in vain. Who the elect are, we know not, till they themselves discover it by the effects produced upon them: nor will it ever be known who the non-elect are, till the day of judgment shall reveal it. But this we know,—and this we affirm for the comfort of all,—that “every one who asketh, receiveth; and every one that seeketh, findeth; and that to every one that knocketh, shall the gate of heaven be opened^g.” What can the most determined opposer of the doctrine of election *say* more than this, or *wish for* more than this?

Some will yet further urge, That, if this doctrine be true,

^e Ezek xxxiii. 11.

^f Rev. xvi. 7.

^g Matt. vii. 7, 8.

men may be saved without any regard to holiness. This objection is of the same kind with the former: and that there is no just ground for it, our text itself sufficiently declares: for we are “elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;”—elect, not to salvation only, but to obedience also;—to the one as the means, and to the other as the end.]

What is spoken respecting our being elect “to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” will lead me to shew, that whom the Father has elected,

II. Christ redeems—

On the subject of obedience being an end to which we are elect, we shall speak under the next head: at present, we confine ourselves to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

That the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, is certain—

[Moses, when he confirmed the covenant which the Israelites entered into with their God, sprinkled both the altar and the people with the blood of the sacrifices^h: and in like manner we, when we embrace the covenant of grace, are sprinkled with the blood of our Great Sacrifice, which purges us from the guilt of all our former sins, and sanctifies us as an holy people unto the Lord: “We come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abelⁱ.”

And here it is particularly to be noticed, that it is not by *the shedding* of the Redeemer’s blood that any are saved, but by *the application* of it to their souls. Millions “perish for whom Christ died^k,” but no one ever perished, whose “heart had been sprinkled from an evil conscience,” and “purged from dead works to serve the living God^l.”]

To this they are elected, as to the necessary means of their acceptance with God—

[None, however elect by God the Father, could come to God, unless a sacrifice were provided for them. All are sinners: all need pardon for their multiplied iniquities: no man could make satisfaction for his own sins. One sacrifice was provided of God for the whole world, even the sacrifice of God’s only-begotten Son. Through that, God determined from all eternity to accept them: and in due time he reveals it to them, as the way opened for their access to him. Thus they are brought to see Christ, as “the way, the truth, and the

^h Exod. xxiv. 6, 8.

^k 1 Cor. viii. 11.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 24.

^l Heb. ix. 14. and x. 22.

life:" and thus they receive "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of all their sins."

We must not however imagine that God elects any in a way inconsistent with his own honour. He does not by a mere absolute decree forgive them: he does not so overlook the honour of his own law, or disregard the demands of his own truth and justice. On the contrary, he provides for them a Saviour, through whose atoning blood they may be forgiven, and in whose obedience they may find a justifying righteousness. If he elected them simply to salvation without any regard to an atonement, he would exercise one attribute at the expense of all the rest: but in electing them to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, he provides for the honour of his broken law, and maintains in united and harmonious exercise the glory of all his perfections: he provides, that "Mercy and truth should meet together, and righteousness and peace should kiss each other^m."]]

As Christ redeems whom the Father has elected, so those, whom Christ has redeemed,

III. The Spirit sanctifies—

It is in reality through the influence of the Holy Ghost that the souls of the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Christ: because it is He who reveals Christ unto them, and enables them to believe on him. But, besides this, "The Spirit sanctifies them to obedience"—

To this are the elect chosen, as to the means whereby their ultimate salvation shall be attained—

[It would be dishonourable to God if an unholy creature were admitted to a participation of his throne: nor, if we could suppose such a creature admitted into heaven, could he be happy there; because he would want all the dispositions which were necessary to qualify him for the enjoyment of that holy place. On this account God has ordained to sanctify his elect in body, soul, and spirit, and to "transform them into his own image in righteousness and true holiness."]

And this work he has committed to the Holy Spirit—

[The Spirit originally breathed upon the face of the waters, and reduced the chaotic mass to order and beauty. So does he move upon the believer's soul. Whatever is corrupt, he mortifies; whatever is wanting, he supplies.

^m Ps. lxxxv. 10.

Above all, he reveals the Saviour to the soul, and thereby changes the soul progressively into the Saviour's imageⁿ. This is precisely what St. Paul also has spoken in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "We are bound to give thanks to God for you all, brethren, beloved, because God hath chosen you to salvation (there is the *end*) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Here are the *means* to that end, even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his atoning blood; and the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul^o.]

INFER—

1. Of what infinite value are the souls of men !

[Every one carries about him a treasure which God himself covets. The Father has given his only dear Son to redeem it: and Christ has shed his own blood to purchase it: and the Holy Ghost is ever striving with us, to make us surrender it up willingly to God — — — O that men would view their souls in this light, and bestow upon them the care which they so richly deserve! — — —]

2. What encouragement has every man to seek after salvation !

[The doctrines of election, of faith in Christ, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit, are supposed by many to create despondency. But, if duly considered, they afford the best possible antidote to despair. Suppose a person to be bowed down under a sense of his own guilt and weakness, is it no comfort to him to reflect, that the Father may elect whomsoever he will; that the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse from guilt even of the deepest dye; and that the Holy Spirit can renew and sanctify a soul, however inveterate its corruptions be? Let this then be the improvement made of these doctrines; and they will soon commend themselves by their cheering and transforming efficacy — — —]

ⁿ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^o 2 Thess. ii. 13.

MMCCCLXXX.

REGENERATION CONSIDERED.

1 Pet. i. 3—5. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

AMONGST the many distinguishing characters of the true Christian, this is not the least remarkable, that he can rejoice in the midst of the heaviest tribulations. Others may be patient under them: but no man who is not born of God can attain this high state of feeling, to glory in them. The Christians to whom the Apostle wrote were in a state of very severe affliction, scattered over divers countries, whither they had been driven by the violence of persecution. Yet, how did the Apostle address them? in terms of pity or condolence? No: but in terms of the sublimest congratulation. He thinks not of what *man* has done *against* them, but of what *God* has done *for* them; and bursts forth in this rapturous strain: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who of his abundant mercy hath begotten us again!” The recollection of the mercy vouchsafed to them by regeneration swallowed up all thought of their trials, and superseded, for a time, all mention of their sufferings.

The terms in which regeneration is here spoken of will lead us to consider it in,

I. Its nature—

Regeneration is a spiritual and supernatural change of heart—

[Many, when they hear this word, are ready to merge its import altogether in the rite of baptism. I deny not, but that the word “regeneration” is used in Scripture as synonymous with baptism; and it was properly so used; because in baptism there is a real change of *state*; and there was good reason to hope that, in the person submitting to that rite there was also a change of *nature*: nor can I doubt, but that, wherever baptism is *duly received*, there is a descent of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, to seal it with a blessing from on high. But the strongest advocates for baptismal regeneration will not deny, but that the spiritual gift is that in which we are chiefly interested; and that, without *that*, the outward act would be of little value. And God forbid that we should be disputing about a *term*, when our main concern should be about *the blessing connected with it!* All are agreed, that we must be baptized with the Holy Ghost: all are agreed, that we must be made “partakers of a new and a divine nature^a,” and

^a 2 Pet. i. 4.

become “new creatures in Christ Jesus^b” in a word, all agree, that, in order to be children of God, we must be “begotten of God:” and *that* being admitted, I am indifferent as to the name by which it shall be called: call it a new birth, a new creation, a renewal in the spirit of the mind, or a conversion of soul to God; only let an entire change of heart and life be included in it, and (though one word may more strictly and appositely express it than another) we are satisfied. Suffice it to say, that “a new heart must be given us, and a new spirit be put within us;” and that this change is essential to us, as children of God.]

It is this that distinguishes the Lord’s people from all the rest of the world—

[The natural man possesses nothing but what he brought into the world with him. His faculties may be of the first order, so far as they relate to earthly things: yet is he as blind as others in relation to heavenly things. In order to comprehend *these*, he must have a spiritual discernment^c; which can only be given to him from above. This may be possessed by the poorest and most illiterate man, whilst it is withheld from the wise and prudent. In fact, God has so ordered it, that “what he has hid from the wise and prudent, should be revealed unto babes^d” and there are but “few of the wise and learned, in comparison,” to whom this gift is imparted; for “God has chosen the weak and foolish, on purpose to confound the wise and mighty^e.” Nor is this a mere conceit: it is proved by the life and conversation of all who are born of God. They shew that they have a view of God and of eternity, which others do not possess: and, in consequence of this view, they manifest a heavenliness, both of heart and life, which others cannot attain. Being born of God, they live no longer to themselves, but unto Him who begat them, and to Him who redeemed them with his blood.]

But in the passage before us we are more particularly led to notice regeneration in;

II. Its causes—

The great *efficient* cause of it is God—

[Jehovah, in the Old Testament, is called “the God of Abraham:” but to us he is revealed under the more endearing title of the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and our God and Father in him. In this relation he is considered as

^b 2 Cor. v. 17.

^d Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

“begetting us again;” and forming us, as it were, altogether anew. This he does by the operation of his word upon the hearts and consciences of men, and by the Almighty power of his Spirit working effectually in them. Hence we are said to be “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by *the word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever^f.” In like manner we are said to be “born of the Spirit^g.” And this birth is not only distinguished from, but put in direct opposition to, the natural birth of man; for “to as many as receive Christ, to them gives he power to *become the sons of God*, even to them that believe on his name; who are *born, not of blood*, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, *but of God*^h.” Here, then, the efficient cause of our regeneration is distinctly marked: it is not effected by any power which is possessed by the man himself, or by others over him, or by any created being: it must be traced to God himself, to God only, to God entirely, to God exclusively.]

The *moving* cause of it is his “mercy”—

[Man never merited it; never asked it; never of himself desired it. God, who sees us when dead in trespasses and sins, is moved only by his own “mercy” towards us, to impart unto us this transcendent gift. He saw us, like new-born infants, “lying in our blood; and bade us liveⁱ.” O! who can ever appreciate this blessing aright? Who can ever estimate the blessing of being “begotten of God,” and “born of God?” To be begotten and born of an earthly monarch were nothing in comparison of it; nothing in respect of honour; nothing in respect of benefit. That we were created *men*, was *grace*; because we might have been of a lower order of beings, like beasts: but to be new-created, after that we were fallen, and by this new creation to be made sons of God, is not only “*mercy*,” but such mercy as never was vouchsafed to the angels that fell: no; it was reserved for *us*: and “abundant” mercy it was! The very angels in heaven have not in this respect been so highly favoured as we: for they can sing of grace only: whereas we, when we had abused and forfeited all the blessings of grace, had them all restored to us through the tender mercy of our God.]

The *instrumental* or *procuring* cause of it was the Lord Jesus Christ—

[In general, the blessings of salvation are traced to the *death* of Christ, as their procuring cause. And such, no doubt, it was: for by it we are reconciled to God, and obtain the

^f 1 Pet. i. 23. See also Jam. i. 18.

^h John i. 12, 13.

^g John iii. 5, 6.

ⁱ Ezek. xvi. 6.

remission of all our sins. But here the blessing of regeneration is traced to the *resurrection* of Christ; and with great propriety; because, if “he was delivered to death for our offences, he was raised again for our justification^k.” To enter into this aright, we should place ourselves in the situation of the immediate followers of our Lord. What comfort should we have derived from the *death* of our Divine Master? We might be told, indeed, that he offered himself a sacrifice for our sins: but how should we know that that sacrifice was accepted in our behalf? It was his resurrection alone that put that matter beyond a doubt: and therefore we find the Apostles everywhere insisting principally on this^l, as proving, beyond all reasonable doubt, that he was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world^m. Moreover, it is as a *risen* Saviour that “he lives to make intercession for usⁿ;” and is enabled to send the Holy Ghost down upon us, for the commencing and perfecting of a work of grace within us^o. Hence St. Paul, speaking of the *death* of Christ as prevailing for our salvation, yet lays the greater stress upon his *resurrection*^p: and hence also, in order to attain higher eminence in the divine life, he desired to “know Christ in the power of his resurrection^q.” So that our regeneration may well be ascribed to the resurrection of Christ, not only on account of its proving his death to have been available for us, but as through it he is empowered to send down the Holy Spirit upon our souls.]

We must, however, proceed yet further to trace this work in,

III. Its effects—

Of its sanctifying effects I have spoken under the first head. But we must on no account omit to notice those great benefits which it confers,

1. In entitling us to heaven—

[Repeatedly does St. Paul mark the indissoluble connexion which God has established between our sonship and our inheritance: “If sons, then heirs, heirs of God *through* Christ, and heirs of God *with* Christ^r.” Now, the inheritance to which God has begotten us is nothing less than all the glory of heaven; an inheritance, “not corruptible,” as earthly treasures, “which moth and rust will corrupt;” “not defiled,” like the earthly Canaan, by wicked inhabitants, (for “into

^k Rom. iv. 25. ^l Acts ii. 24—36. iii. 15. and xvii. 3, 18, 31.

^m Rom. i. 4. ⁿ Heb. vii. 25. ^o Acts ii. 33, 38, 39.

^p Rom. viii. 34. and v. 10. ^q Phil. iii. 10.

^r Rom. viii. 17. Gal. iv. 7.

heaven nothing entereth that can defile^s;) “not fading,” by use, or age, or enjoyment, like the pleasures of sense: no, it is an inheritance worthy of God to give to his beloved children, even that inheritance which Christ himself, as our Forerunner, our Head, and Representative, already occupies. “To a lively hope of this” are we begotten, whilst yet we are in this vale of tears; and to the full possession of it, as soon as we go hence.]

2. In securing to us the possession of it—

[In two ways is this inheritance secured to us: “it is reserved by God for us; and we are kept by God for it;” so that neither shall it be taken from us by any enemy; nor shall we be suffered to come short of it through our own weakness. This is what God promised, by his prophet of old: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me^t.” O inestimable gift! This security is the crown of all. What would regeneration be without it? What would it be to be made sons of God, and heirs of heaven, if we were left to ourselves, to engage in our own strength our great adversary? Truly there is not one of us, however elevated he may at this moment be, who would not, in a very short space of time, if left to himself, become a child of Satan, and an heir of hell. But the power of God! what shall withstand *that*? or who shall fail, that has *that* exerted for him? All that is required of us is, to “have faith in God^u.” If only our faith be as a grain of mustard-seed, there is nothing^v that we shall not be able to effect^x. But “Christ has prayed for us, that our faith may not fail; and therefore, though Satan desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat,” yet shall he not finally prevail against us^y; but “shall be bruised under our feet^z,” even as he was under the feet of our triumphant Saviour: for “because HE, our Almighty Saviour, liveth, we shall live also^a.” Like persons in an impregnable fortress^b, we may defy all the powers of darkness, and smile at all the confederacies both of earth and hell.]

OBSERVE then, beloved,

1. How happy are the saints, the sons of God—

[If we consider only the “hope,” “the lively hope,” to which they are begotten, methinks they are by far the happiest of all mankind. But, if we take a view of the inheritance itself,

^s Rev. xxi. 27.

^t Jer. xxxii. 40.

^u Mark xi. 22. John xiv. 1.

^x Matt. xvii. 20.

^y Luke xxii. 31, 32. ^z Rom. xvi. 20.

^a John xiv. 19.

^b This is the precise import of the word *φρουρούμενος*.

the wonderful inheritance to which they are begotten—and, above all, the security which they possess for the ultimate enjoyment of it—what shall I say? Are *they* not happy? Or can they be placed in any circumstances whatever (sin only excepted) wherein they are not proper objects of envy to the whole creation? Be it granted, that they are as much oppressed as ever saints were, and as destitute of all earthly comfort; still will I congratulate them from my inmost soul, and bid them exclaim with joy and gratitude, “Blessed be God, who hath begotten us again!” — — —]

2. How pitiable is the condition of the unregenerate—

[You, alas! have no part or lot in the felicity of God’s children. Never having been begotten of him, you have no relation to him, nor any title to his inheritance. Ah! think, then, whose children ye are^c, and with whom you must take your everlasting portion^d! I tremble to announce such awful tidings. But I thank God that yet ye may become new creatures: for, as all the saints once were what ye now are, so may ye become what they are^e. Yes, the word, which is God’s great instrument, yet sounds in your ears: and it is as powerful as ever, to convert souls to him^f. Only receive it into your hearts by faith; and it shall “turn you,” as it has unnumbered millions of your fellow-creatures, “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God^g.” Only believe in Christ, and you shall instantly become sons of God^h, and be enabled to look up to heaven as your everlasting inheritance. My dear brethren, “make not light of” this great salvation. Do but think how “ready it is to be revealed,” and how certainly it shall be attained by all who believe in Christ. May God now pour out his Holy Spirit upon you all, that not one of you may “receive this grace of God in vain!”]

^c John viii. 44.

^d Matt. xxv. 41.

^e Gal. iv. 12.

^f Heb. iv. 12.

^g Acts xxvi. 18.

^h John i. 12. before cited, with Gal. iii. 26.

MMCCCLXXXI.

THE END OF AFFLICTION.

1 Pet. i. 6, 7. *Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

THE enlightening and converting of souls are the first objects of a minister's attention: nevertheless, the comforting of God's people is also an essential part of his duty. This was the special direction which God gave to the prophet of old^a: it is a conformity to the Divine Exemplar^b: it is the fruit of the comforts they themselves receive^c." St. Peter is a striking pattern of a sympathizing and affectionate pastor. He writes to the Christians who were scattered through divers countries; and begins with setting before them the richest topics of consolation^d. He shews them the blessed end for which their present troubles are suffered to come upon them—

I. The state and condition of God's people—

Believers have at all times within themselves a ground of joy: yet they are also frequently oppressed with deep and pungent sorrow. They experience a peculiar and united exercise of these opposite affections.

They "greatly rejoice" in the mercy which has been vouchsafed unto them—

[They have been begotten of God to a lively hope of a glorious inheritance: they see that inheritance reserved for them, and themselves kept for it. This cannot but be matter of exceeding joy to them at all times.]

But they are at the same time encompassed with manifold temptations—

[They are hated, reviled, and persecuted by the world: they are assailed with "the fiery darts of the devil:" they are harassed with innumerable corruptions in their own hearts.]

Through these temptations they are sometimes "in great heaviness"—

[Grace does not destroy, but only moderates our natural feelings. Christians therefore may be deeply oppressed with grief: not that God will suffer them to continue always in heaviness. Nevertheless he permits them to be in this state occasionally, and "for a season."]

There is "a necessity" that they should undergo trials of this kind—

^a Isai. xlii. 1. ^b 2 Cor. vii. 6. ^c 2 Thess. i. 3, 4. ^d ver. 3—5.

[God could save them without leaving them to endure any trial; but he “perfected his own Son by sufferings:” he has ordained that the members shall in this respect be conformed to their Head^e.]

Their temptations, however afflictive at the time, are permitted for their good.

II. The end for which they are suffered to be in that state—

Temptations, of whatever kind they be, are justly called “trials of our faith”—

[No man can exercise the grace of patience, or of contentment, unless he be in a situation that may give rise to impatience or discontent: nor can faith be known to exist in the heart, unless there be some circumstances that give scope for the manifestation of it; but temptations, especially such as produce much grief, can be surmounted only by strong faith. Hence God himself speaks as though he discovered Abraham’s grace by means of the difficulties into which he was brought^f.]

In this view they are “much more precious than the trial of gold”—

[Gold, though it stand the trial of the fire, will perish at last; but faith, in its effects at least, will endure for ever. The value and the brightness given to gold by the furnace are not so estimable, as the purity and brightness which our faith derives from affliction.]

Their real worth will not be discerned till the day of judgment—

[They will have a different aspect in “the day of Christ’s appearing” from what they have now. The benefit resulting from them will be then fully discovered.]

They will then “be found to the praise and honour of those who endured them”—

[Every thing we have done or suffered for Christ will be brought to light: a reward proportioned to our faithfulness will then be given us. Great sufferings will issue in “an eternal weight of glory”.]

They will be declared also to the praise and honour of Christ himself—

[Christ is “the author and finisher of our faith:” he will have the glory of carrying his people through their trials.

^e Zech. xiii. 9.

^f Gen. xxii. 12.

Thus they will issue in the good of the sufferers, and the glory of Christ.]

This is the end for which God permits his people to endure them—

INFER—

1. How little cause have any persons to question their interest in God's favour on account of their trials, or their grief under them!

[Satan takes advantage of the afflictions of the saints to impress their minds with desponding thoughts: their natural turn of mind, too, sometimes favours such impressions. Even bodily disorder also may concur to deject their souls. But the being in heaviness through temptations is no just ground of doubting our acceptance with God. The persons of whom the Apostle speaks in the text, were most undoubtedly in a converted state^g. Let not any tempted soul then be desponding or dejected^h.]

2. What abundant reason have we to be reconciled to afflictions!

[Afflictions are trying to our frail nature, but they are salutary to our soulsⁱ. We shall ere long see the necessity and benefit of each of our sorrows. The praise and honour in which they will issue will make amends for all. Let us then even now account them "precious^k:" let us consider how light they are, when compared with the glory of heaven^l: let us only be concerned to possess our souls in patience^m.]

^g They were "begotten again," had "a lively hope," "believed in Christ," "loved him," "rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable," and had "received the salvation of their souls." ver. 3, 8, 9.

^h Isai. xl. 27—31.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 11.

^k Jam. i. 2, 3.

^l Rom. viii. 18.

^m Jam. i. 4.

MMCCCLXXXII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S HAPPINESS.

1 Pet. i. 8, 9. *Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*

THE world often wonder that Christians do not conform to the vices of the age^a: and are yet more

^a 1 Pet. iv. 4.

surprised, that any should be willing to suffer for the sake of their religion. But every Christian is actuated by a principle of love to Christ; which principle even gathers strength from the opposition it meets with. The Apostle is writing to those who were in heaviness through manifold temptations. He declares, however, that their trials were promoting their eternal good; and that they were supported under them by their attachment to their adorable Redeemer.

In his words we may see,

I. The state of true Christians—

Christians cannot be distinguished better by any thing, than by their regard to their Divine Master :

1. They love Christ—

[Once, like the ungodly around them, they were enemies to Christ and his cross^b: they “saw no beauty in him, for which he was to be desired^c.” But now he is truly precious to their souls^d: and they claim him as their best friend and portion^e. This is the character of every true Christian^f — — — If any answer not to this character, they are, and must be, accursed^g.]

2. They rejoice in Christ—

[They have a good hope, if not a full assurance, of an interest in him. They have access to him in their secret duties. They receive strengthening and refreshing communications from him. They rejoice in him, as their faithful and almighty Friend^h. Their joy in him is “incapable of being fully declaredⁱ.” It is a “glorified” joy, such as the saints in heaven possess^k. Every Christian indeed does not experience the same measure of joy; nor is any one at all times alike joyful: but no one is a Christian, who does not esteem the light of the Redeemer's countenance above every other good^l.]

That their felicity may be more generally experienced, we proceed to state,

II. The means by which they attain it—

[Many suppose, that if they could have a personal interview with Christ, such as Paul was favoured with, they should

^b Phil. iii. 19.

^c Isai. liii. 2.

^d 1 Pet. ii. 7.

^e Cant. v. 16.

^f Eph. vi. 24.

^g 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^h Phil. iv. 4.

ⁱ ἀνεκλαλήτω.

^k δεδοξασμένη.

Ps. iv. 6. and lxxiii. 25.

love him, and rejoice in him. But a sight of him with the bodily eyes only never in any instance produced this effect. Many who even heard his discourses, and beheld his miracles, were amongst his bitterest enemies. The Christians to whom St. Peter wrote had never *seen* Christ. The Apostle *twice* mentions this circumstance, to shew that their regard for him did not arise from any personal acquaintance with him. *Faith* is the only mean whereby we are brought to this love and joy: as it is said, "in whom *believing*, ye rejoice." It is only by faith that we can behold the excellency of Christ — — — by faith only that we can apply his merits to ourselves — — — by faith only that we can receive his gracious communications^m. Repentance will *lead to* this state; and obedience *spring from* it: but it is faith only that will prevail to *bring us into* itⁿ.]

To increase our ardour in pressing forward to this state, let us consider,

III. The blessedness of those who have attained it—

[The salvation of the soul is the great "end of our faith." Present comforts are desirable; but eternal happiness is that which the Christian has principally in view. It is to this that he looks forward, under his first convictions. This is the end for which he cheerfully endures all his privations and conflicts. In every possible state he has an eye to this, as the consummation of all his hopes and desires. And this blessed object is already attained by all true Christians: they do not wait for it till they arrive in heaven; their full reward indeed is reserved for another world. But believers have the foretastes of heaven already communicated to them; yea, their love to Christ, and their joy in him, are an earnest, as well as pledge, of their eternal inheritance; they *now*, in a way of anticipation and actual enjoyment, "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."]

INFER—

1. What a rational character is the Christian!

[He is thought an enthusiast, for loving and rejoicing in Christ; and they who have no such love or joy appropriate to themselves the name of *rational* Christians. Now we are willing to meet our adversaries on this ground, and to submit our sentiments to this test. If to admire supreme excellence, to love infinite amiableness, and to rejoice in unbounded goodness, be a *rational* employment; yea, if the glorified saints and angels be rational, then the Christian is a *rational* character; and the more so, in proportion as he loves and rejoices in

^m Eph. iii. 17.

ⁿ Rom. xv. 13.

Christ: and their adversaries are most *irrational*, in that they can love and rejoice in the things of time and sense, and yet feel no love to, nor any joy in, our adorable Lord and Saviour. Let those who are now despised as enthusiasts, think who will be accounted *rational* in the day of judgment — — —]

2. How clearly may we know, whether we be real Christians or not!

[There are certainly different degrees of faith, love, and joy; but every true Christian experiences them in some measure. This is decided by an authority that cannot be doubted°. Let us then examine what is the supreme object of our affections, and chief source of our joys — — — Nor let us ever conclude well of our state, unless we can adopt from our hearts the language of St. Paul; “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord^p.”]

° Phil. iii. 3.

p Phil. iii. 8.

MMCCCLXXXIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROPHECIES.

1 Pet. i. 10—12. *Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

THE same “salvation” that is made known to us, was revealed from the beginning. It was gradually unfolded to the world by many succeeding prophets. It is indeed exhibited as with meridian splendour in the New Testament. Yet by comparing the predictions of the prophets with the writings of the Apostles, we attain at once the fullest evidence of its divine original, and the deepest insight into its mysterious doctrines.

The truth of this observation will appear, while we consider,

I. The substance of the prophecies—

Though many things contained in them related only to the times wherein they were written, yet much of them undoubtedly relates to future and distant periods.

The grand scope of them *in the general* is “the grace that should come unto us”—

[The Gospel is called “grace,” because it is the highest expression of God’s kindness towards our guilty world. It declares the wonderful provision which he has made for our recovery, and calls us to receive his blessings as a free unmerited gift. It represents every part of our salvation as the effect of his grace, and requires us now, as well as hereafter, to give him all the glory of it.]

More particularly Christ is the sum and substance of the prophecies—

[God himself tells us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy^a,” the prophets “testified plainly of *the sufferings* of Christ.” So minutely did they describe the smallest and most improbable circumstances of his death, that their writings appear rather like a narration than a prophecy^b: nor did they speak less accurately respecting “*his glory* that should follow.” Every step of his exaltation, from his resurrection to his future coming to judge the world, is distinctly marked^c; and the triumph of his Gospel over the benighted Gentiles is proclaimed with confidence and exultation^d.]

As in this light they deserve the deepest attention, so do they also on account of,

II. The importance of them—

The words before us mark the importance of the prophecies in a variety of views:

1. They were dictated by “the Spirit of Christ”—

[The Holy Ghost was the agent whom Christ employed from the beginning^e: through him did Christ inspire the prophets, and enlighten the world^f. Thus were all the prophecies clearly of divine original; and can any thing more strongly mark their value and importance?]

^a Rev. xix. 10. and John v. 39.

^b See Ps. xxii. 8, 16, 18. and lxix. 21. and Isai. liii.

^c Ps. lxxviii. 18. and ii. 6.

^d Ps. ii. 8. Compare Rom. xv. 9—12.

^e Compare 1 Pet. iii. 18—20.

^f 2 Pet. i. 21.

2. The Prophets themselves “inquired and searched diligently” into their meaning—

[The inspired men did not understand the precise import of their own prophecies. They only knew that they “ministered to the Church in distant ages;” but they studied the word, and sometimes with good effect, to gain an insight into the intentions and purposes of God^g. And if they judged their predictions so important while they were involved in obscurity, shall they be less valuable to us who have seen their accomplishment?]

3. The Apostles, in declaring their accomplishment, received miraculous testimonies from the Holy Ghost—

[They, “who first preached the Gospel, *reported* those things *as done*, which the prophets had *beforehand testified*” *as to be done* in due time; and their word was accompanied “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven^h.” Nor was this divine seal ever more immediately set to their ministrations than when they expressly referred to the prophecies as fulfilled in Jesusⁱ. Nothing surely could put a greater honour on the prophecies than this.]

4. The very Angels “desire to look into them”—

[The angelic figures over the ark were formed looking down upon it^k. This intimated the interest they feel in the work of redemption. They are indeed made wiser by the revelation given to the Church^l. Though they dwell in the presence of God, they desire to know more of this mystery. Though they have no personal interest in it, they long to comprehend it. Can we then, whose interest in it is so great, have low thoughts of any part of those Scriptures which exhibit and illustrate it?]

INFER—

1. What a mercy is it to live under the full light of the Gospel!

[Those things, which the patriarchs saw only in types and prophecies, we are privileged to enjoy in their substance and accomplishment. Well therefore does Christ say to us, “Blessed are your eyes, blessed are your ears;” but if our light be greater than theirs, our obligations to follow it are proportionably increased; and if we neglect to improve it, surely both prophets and angels will appear against us to condemn us.]

^g Dan. ix. 2.

^h Heb. ii. 4.

ⁱ Acts x. 43, 44.

^k Exod. xxv. 20.

^l Eph. iii. 10.

2. In searching the Scriptures we should attend particularly to what is said of Christ—

[Many read the Scriptures without ever discovering the fulness and excellency of Christ; but as “they testify of *him*,” so we are most concerned in what relates to him. Let us then fix our eyes diligently on that ark of God; let us treasure up in our minds whatever is spoken of “his sufferings and glory;” and, “mixing faith with what we read,” let us seek to be made wise unto salvation.]

MMCCCLXXXIV.

THE ANGELS INTERESTED ABOUT THE GOSPEL.

1 Pet. i. 12. *Which things the angels desire to look into.*

THE Gospel comes recommended to us by a great variety of most important considerations. It occupied the mind of God from all eternity. From the beginning of the world it has been revealed with gradually increasing light and evidence. When the period arrived for its full promulgation, it was opened by the Lord of life himself, and was spread with incredible effect by a few poor fishermen, whom he chose and qualified to proclaim it. The Holy Ghost also bore testimony to it by miracles unnumbered, that were wrought expressly in confirmation of it. But there is one circumstance, which is rarely adverted to, which yet should exceedingly endear the Gospel to us; namely, that the holy angels are greatly interested in it, and that they are daily studying to comprehend it. This is affirmed by St. Peter in the words before us: for the elucidation of which we shall point out,

I. The subjects of their inquiry—

The two preceding verses inform us, that the “salvation” of man, and “the grace that is brought unto us” for the securing of that salvation, are objects of their continual regard. More particularly they inquire into these things,

1. As foretold by prophets—

[Every minute circumstance relative to the Gospel has been foretold by one or other of the prophets; insomuch, that, if we understood perfectly every part of the prophetic writings, we might extract from them as complete an account of the person, work, and offices of Christ, and of the establishment of his kingdom upon earth, as from the New Testament itself. But the prophets did not know the full extent of their own prophecies. They knew that they spake by a divine impulse; but the precise import of what they spake, they knew not. As the *wicked* Caiaphas, intending to stimulate the Jewish council to put Jesus to death, delivered unwittingly a prophecy that Jesus should die for the whole world^a; so the *pious* prophets frequently delivered their sentiments in language, which was dictated by the Holy Ghost for the purpose of proclaiming mysteries which they themselves understood not. Hence they “inquired and searched diligently” into the meaning of their own prophecies^b. The angels, in like manner, are desirous of investigating these deep subjects. To intimate the concern which they take in these things, there was a very striking emblem of it in the Jewish temple. In the holy of holies was the ark: on that was placed the mercy-seat: and over that were two cherubims overshadowing it with their wings. The ark (in which the tables of the law were kept) was a type of Christ, in whose heart the law was; and by whom it was fulfilled for us; and through whose obedience to it God exercises mercy towards us. This exhibited the substance of the Gospel. Now the cherubims were formed somewhat in an inclined posture, looking down upon the ark^c: and this was ordered of God on purpose to denote the interest which angels take in this deep mystery, and the desire which they have to comprehend it: and it is to this very thing that St. Peter alludes in the words of our text^d.]

2. As executed by Christ—

“The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,” were fully declared before he became incarnate. The angels therefore were prepared for that stupendous series of events which in the fulness of time began to be accomplished: and, no doubt, they waited for them with devout and earnest expectation. Accordingly, the very instant that they saw him brought into the world, they carried the glad tidings to the shepherds, and informed them of the place of his nativity. From that moment, and especially in the most important scenes of his life, they watched him, not only as anxious spectators, but as agents employed by their Creator to minister to

^a John xi. 49—52.
Exod. xxv. 20.

^b ver. 10, 11.

^d ἐπιθυμοῦσιν παρακύψαι.

his necessities, or to attest his triumphs. After his temptations in the wilderness, and his conflicts in the garden, they gladly interposed their friendly offices to comfort and support him. Though we are not expressly told that they were present at his crucifixion, we can have no doubt but that they attended on him at that awful period with more than ordinary solicitude. Were they capable of sorrow, methinks, their eyes would on that occasion be as a fountain of tears; and they would beat their breasts with grief and anguish. But with what joy did they roll away the stone from his sepulchre, in order that his re-animated body might arise^e! How happy were they to satisfy the inquiring females respecting the truth of his resurrection, and the accomplishment of his own predictions! At his ascension, too, they comforted his astonished followers, by announcing to them his intended return in the clouds of heaven at the last day. Shall we say that in these things they were mere servants and messengers, who felt no interest in the events themselves? We know the contrary: for at his birth a whole multitude of the heavenly hosts burst forth into that rapturous hymn, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"]

3. As enjoyed by the Church—

[It is not in a speculative view merely that they contemplate the great work of redemption: they consider it as "the grace that is brought unto us:" and in that view their benevolent hearts are most deeply affected with it. Hence, as well as from a sense of duty to their God, arose that affectionate solicitude which they expressed on all the occasions above referred to. Wherever the glad tidings are carried, they hasten, to mark the effects produced by them: and if they behold a sinner impressed by them with humble penitence and contrition, not even the presence of their God, nor all the glory of heaven, will keep them from rejoicing on his account. They acquire, as it were, new joy from every triumph that the Redeemer gains, and from every benefit that man receives. From the moment of a sinner's return to God, they watch over him with the tenderest care. They encamp around him, and minister unto him. Little do we think how much we are indebted to their friendly aid; from how many snares they deliver us; in how many conflicts they succour us; and with what transport they bear our triumphant spirits into the world of bliss. As once they waited with impatience to see the prophecies accomplished, and the work of redemption executed in the person of Christ; so do they now wait with ardent desire to see the consummation of the Church's happiness,

^e Matt. xxviii. 2--4.

and the completion of the Redeemer's glory. And at that great and solemn day will whole myriads of them attend, to perform their last kind offices to God's elect; to assemble them in one collective body; and to unite with them in ascribing everlasting praises to God and to the Lamb. They cannot indeed say, "He has loved *us* and washed *us*;" but they will most heartily join in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."]

Their solicitude about things that relate to us, however strange it may appear at first sight, will not be thought strange, if we consider,

II. The reasons of it—

If we were unable to assign any reasons for their conduct, we might be well assured that their actions were regulated by wisdom and prudence.

But it is not difficult to account for their anxiety respecting these things: they look into them, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but,

1. Because of the glory of God displayed in them—

[The angels have been blessed with many bright discoveries of the Divine glory, both in the works of creation and of providence. But these have all been eclipsed by the brighter displays of it in the works of redemption. Every thing in the universe bespeaks the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God: and the punishment inflicted on the fallen angels declares his justice and holiness. But the plan of salvation revealed in the Gospel is represented as being eminently, and beyond all comparison, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God." Terrible as the justice of God appears in the miseries of the damned, it appears incomparably more tremendous in the sufferings of the Son of God, which were inflicted on him for our sins, and which were indispensably necessary to satisfy its inexorable demands. But what shall we say of mercy? There was not a single trace of that to be found in the whole universe. The angels, after seeing the judgments executed on the apostate spirits, could have no idea that mercy could be exercised towards the guilty. But in the Gospel it shines forth as with meridian splendour; and all the other perfections of the Deity unite and harmonize with it. Can we wonder then, that when they have a prospect of beholding "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they should look into that glass which reflects it? Can we wonder that they should examine with unwearied attention the prophecies that relate to Christ, the various incidents of his life and death,

and the numberless benefits that he confers on all his followers? This alone were ample reason for all the care and diligence they can possibly exert.]

2. Because of the benefit accruing to themselves from the contemplation of them—

[Wise as those bright intelligences are, we have no doubt but that *they are made wiser* by their progressive discoveries of the truth of God. The revealing of the Gospel unto man is one way which God has adopted for the further illumination of the heavenly hosts: he makes known his manifold wisdom to the Church, in order that by the Church it may be exhibited before the eyes of angels and archangels^f. We have no reason to think that they have any revelations made to them, except through the medium of the Church: and consequently, if they would grow in knowledge, they must search, as it were, the sacred oracles, and “draw their water out of our wells of salvation.”

But by their contemplation of the Gospel *they are made happier* too, as well as wiser. For, in what does their happiness consist? Is it not derived principally from the knowledge of God, and their admiration of all his glorious perfections? But it has been before shewn, that their views of the Divine glory are rendered incomparably more clear and full by the representations given of it in the Gospel: consequently, their admiration of God must continually increase; and their delight in him be proportionably enlarged.]

INFER—

1. How unfounded is men's contempt of the Gospel!

[The Gospel ever has been despised by proud self-sufficient men, and ever will be, as long as such men continue upon earth. It will ever appear “foolishness to the natural man.” It is still loaded with reproach, and stigmatized with opprobrious names; and he must be “a stranger indeed in our Jerusalem,” who has not known and witnessed this humiliating fact. But what do these scoffers think of themselves? Are they wiser or better than the angels? Do they imagine the angels so weak as to admire and search into things which are unworthy the notice of a sensible man? Alas! these proud despisers of God and of good men evince to the world, that they themselves are the greatest objects of pity and compassion. We do not, however, say to them as Paul did to the obstinate

^f Eph. iii. 10.

and obdurate Jews, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and *perish*^g;" but rather, Behold, and wonder, and *adore*.]

2. How criminal is their neglect of it!

[Though the angels are in some measure interested in the Gospel, yet their concern with it is not to be compared with ours. They would have been happy, though no Saviour had come into the world: but where should *we* have been? what would have become of *us*? Christ took not on him *their* nature: he shed not his blood for *them*: it was for *us* he became a man: for *us* he died upon the cross. What guilt then do we contract in slighting all his overtures of mercy! Surely the angels will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us, if we are indifferent to the salvation he has so dearly purchased, and so freely offered.]

3. How great a blessing is it to be well instructed in it!

[We do not wish to depreciate human knowledge: but we do not hesitate to affirm, that all other knowledge, how deep, extensive, or valuable soever it may be, is no better than dung and dross in comparison of this^h. All other knowledge shall vanish away; but this shall endure for ever. Angels would account all other things beneath their notice: but they never think they can pay too much attention to this. Know then, that if your eyes are opened to behold aright the great mystery of redemption, you have the most valuable gift that God himself can bestow. You have that which will bring salvation to your soul. Yea, if you have but moderately clear views of the Gospel, you are in that respect greater and more highly-favoured than all the prophets; not excepting even John himself, who was more than a prophet, and had the distinguished honour of pointing out to men "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world." Whatever then God has bestowed upon you, value this above all: whatever he has withheld from you, be satisfied with this. Whatever you do, or whatever you neglect, be sure to cultivate this. Resemble the angels in "looking into these things;" and you shall resemble them in holiness, and be with them in glory.]

^g Acts xiii. 41.

^h Phil. iii. 8.

MMCCCLXXXV.

DIRECTIONS HOW TO SEEK HEAVEN WITH SUCCESS.

1 Pet. i. 13. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

THE truths of God deserve our attention on account of their own excellence; but they are principally to be valued for the effects they produce on our lives. The Apostles never rest satisfied with stating a mere system of doctrines, they invariably proceed to make a practical application of them to the soul. St. Peter had briefly opened the blessed state of true believers. He had represented them as begotten to a glorious inheritance, of which their joy in Christ was an earnest, and to which, through their present trials, they would be advanced. He then urged the near approach of that glory, as a reason for exerting themselves more diligently in their Christian calling—“*Wherefore,*” &c.

The words of the text lead us to consider,

I. The great object of a Christian’s pursuit—

There are in Scripture many beautiful descriptions of heaven, but none more interesting than that contained in the words before us.

The day of judgment is here called “the revelation of Jesus Christ”—

[Jesus Christ was revealed in the first promise that was made to man^a. He was also exhibited in the sacrifices which Abel offered^b. In successive ages he was made known in clearer prophecies^c, and typified by various ordinances of the Jewish ritual^d. In process of time he was personally “manifested in human flesh,” and shewed himself to be the Son of God by most irrefragable proofs^e. In the preaching of his

^a Gen. iii. 15.

^b Heb. xi. 4. and xii. 24.

^c Gen. xxii. 18. and Isai. liii. 4, 5, 11.

^d Compare Exod. xii. 5. with 1 Pet. i. 19.

^e Acts ii. 22. Rom. i. 4.

Gospel he was yet more fully revealed. The glory of God as shining in his face is most transcendently displayed^f; still however “we see him as yet only through a glass darkly^g.” But in the last day he will appear in all his majesty and glory^h: he will “be *revealed* from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fireⁱ.” His enemies, no less than his friends, will then see him to be “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”]

In that day, “grace will be brought unto us”—

[Grace and glory are sometimes used as synonymous terms in Scripture^k; indeed, grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated. The spiritual blessings which God bestows, appear *now* to be the gifts of grace^l; but how much more shall we acknowledge the glories of heaven to be so! How shall we marvel at the goodness of God in all his dealings towards us! How shall we adore his wisdom, even in the darkest of his dispensations. How shall we stand amazed that *we* were saved, while so many others were lost! Surely, “when the top-stone is brought forth, we shall cry, Grace, grace, unto it^m.” All this felicity “shall be brought unto us” openly, and in rich abundance. *Now*, the grace imparted to us is small, though “sufficient for us;” and the consolations vouchsafed unto us, are known only to ourselves. But *in that day* the kingdom will be given us in the presence of the whole universeⁿ; and our happiness shall be commensurate with our capacities and desires. What we partake of *now*, we obtain by diligent pursuit. What we receive *then*, shall be “brought unto us” freely by the hand of Jesus himself.]

In the meantime it becomes us to seek it with all earnestness.

II. In what manner we ought to seek it—

The directions given by the Apostle are very suitable and instructive—

He recommends to us three things:

1. Activity of mind—

[The Jews were accustomed to wear long garments; these they girded about their loins, when it was needful to use expedition^o. By this figure, familiar to them, the Apostle represents our duty. Our minds are dissipated by ten thousand vanities, and our affections, for the most part, flow loosely

^f 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^h Matt. xxv. 31.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^k 2 Cor. iii. 18. compared with the text.

^l Eph. ii. 7, 8.

^m Zech. iv. 7.

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 32, 34.

^o Luke xii. 35—37.

round us, but our thoughts and desires should be carefully gathered in. We should pray, like David, “*Unite my heart to fear thy name*”^p. Heaven is not to be sought with a divided heart. Earthly affections would impede our progress, as flowing garments in a race: the prophet compares them to an incumbrance of thick clay upon the feet^q. We should therefore “gird up the loins of our mind,” and “*give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.*”]

2. Sobriety of manners—

[Sobriety, in the scripture use of the term, means moderation. Excessive cares, and inordinate attachments, are very unfavourable to the soul: they so engross the mind with *present* things, as to draw it away from those which are *eternal*. We cannot therefore too carefully watch against these evils. We should endeavour to be “dying daily” to the world. We should be as one crucified to it; and it, as one crucified to us^r. This is the state and character of every true Christian^s; and we must attain it, if we would successfully pursue the one thing needful.]

3. Steadfastness of faith—

[Faith respects the certainty of the promises; and hope, the accomplishment. Now, our faith is apt to waver, and our hope, to languish. Temptations often allure us to forego our interest in heavenly things, and unbelief would often persuade us that we have no part or lot in them. But we must be careful never to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel^t. Hope is the very anchor of the soul, that must keep us steadfast in this tempestuous world^u. We must “therefore hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm *to the end*”^x. The nearer we come to the prize, the more earnest should be our expectation of it. If our conflicts be many, we should, even against hope, believe in hope^y. The proper disposition of our souls is well described by the Apostles^z—; and it is to persons of this description only, that Christ’s appearance will be a source of joy^a.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are only nominal Christians—

[Your loins indeed are girt, but it is for the pursuit of earthly objects. Instead of having your souls engrossed with heavenly things, you are perfectly indifferent towards them. As for your hopes they extend to nothing but what relates to

^p Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

^s Gal. v. 24.

^x Heb. iii. 6.

^a Heb. ix. 28.

^q Hab. ii. 6.

^t Col. i. 23.

^y Rom. iv. 18.

^r Gal. vi. 14.

^u Heb. vi. 19.

^z 2 Pet. iii. 12.

this present life. Alas! what an awful contrast is there between you and the true Christian! What then, suppose ye, shall be brought to *you* at the revelation of Jesus Christ? The Apostle, in a fore-cited passage, tells you, it will be “vengeance^b”; yes, and Jesus will bring it with his own hand. It is in vain to think that your portion will be the same with that of a diligent, self-denying Christian. But, blessed be God, grace is now brought to you by the Gospel; yea, all the glory of heaven is now offered you by God himself^c. Only repent, and go unto God as reconciled in Christ Jesus, then shall you “pass from death to life,” and from hell to heaven.]

2. Those who are Christians indeed—

[There are some, who “shine as lights in a dark world:” some, who, while living on earth, “have their conversation in heaven.” Doubtless, ye meet with many conflicts and troubles in your way. To you then in particular is the text addressed: for persons circumstanced like you these words were written^d. Survey that grace which is now speedily to be brought unto you. Take a view of all the glory and felicity of the heavenly world; compare with that your light and momentary afflictions: you will then soon form the same estimate as St. Paul before you did^e. Be not then diverted from the great object of your pursuit. Remember the solemn caution which God himself has given you^f—; and take for your encouragement that faithful promise^g—]

^b 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^c Acts ii. 38, 39.

^d 1 Pet. i. 1, 6.

^e Rom. viii. 18.

^f Heb. x. 38.

^g Matt. xxiv. 13.

MMCCCLXXXVI.

NECESSITY OF HOLINESS.

1 Pet. i. 15, 16. *As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*

IT is thought by many, that the Gospel is unfriendly to morality: and it must be confessed, that, when stated in all its freeness and in all its richness, it bears that aspect: for it proclaims a free and full salvation to men; and *that* solely by faith. It declares, that if men rely on their works, in any measure, for justification before God, or perform them in any respect with a view to obtain justification by them, they make void the cross of Christ, and cut

themselves off from all hope of an interest in him. The Gospel authorizes us to say, that the most abandoned of mankind are as welcome to all its benefits as the most moral; and that “where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound.” Now, these statements certainly do *appear* open to the objection that is brought against them: for, if past sins are no bar to our acceptance with God, and moral services cannot procure it, to what purpose is it to avoid sin, or to do good works? We may as well at once give loose to all our evil propensities, and “continue in sin, that grace may abound.” Now, it is worthy of particular notice, that these were the very objections urged against St. Paul’s statements^a: and he was constrained to answer them, not by weakening the force of his statements, but by obviating the objections themselves; and shewing, that the Gospel, as preached by him, both made provision for holiness, and secured it against a possibility of failure^b. The truth is, that though the law, *as a covenant*, is superseded by the Gospel, which introduces a better covenant, it is in force as much as ever, *as a rule of life*; and that, whilst we are without the law, *in relation to its ceremonial ordinances*, we are “not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,” *in relation to its moral power and ascendancy*^c. St. Peter shews this with peculiar force: for, speaking to persons who were called to the knowledge of Christ and of salvation by him, he cites out of the Levitical law the command of God respecting holiness, and applies it to Christians as still existing in all its primitive force. Without any fear, therefore, of being *legal*, as it is called, or of clogging the Gospel with duties not pertaining to it, I proceed to set before you,

I. The injunction given us—

Repeatedly was this command given to the Jews of old^d. Let us consider,

1. Its import—

^a Rom. v. 1, 15.

^b Rom. iii. 31.

^c 1 Cor. ix. 21.

^d Lev. xi. 44. xix. 2. and xx. 7

[Holiness is a conformity to the mind and will of God. And to it are we called by the Gospel^e. “The grace which brings salvation to us, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world^f.” *Negative* holiness, if I may so express myself, is to be sought in the first instance. We are “no longer to fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance^g;” but, advancing to the *positive* execution of our duty, we are to be “holy in all manner of conversation.” In all our walk with God, we must be sincere and upright: there must be no allowed guile in our hearts. And in our intercourse with men, every action, word, and thought, must be under the influence of love, and agreeable to its dictates. Neither times nor circumstances are so to operate as to produce in us any allowed deviation from God’s perfect law. We are to be altogether “a holy people unto the Lord.” It was for this end that the Lord Jesus Christ both lived and died, even “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works^h.” And to this are we chosen by God himself: for though “we were chosen to salvation, it was to be through sanctification of the Spirit, as well as through the belief of the truthⁱ.” To this effect St. Paul speaks: “God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we may be holy^k.” And to the same effect St. Peter also says, in the commencement of this epistle; “We are elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience^l.” The command then is clear, that we are to be holy both in heart and life.]

2. The reason with which it is enforced—

[As children of God, we ought to be “children of obedience.” The very circumstance of our having been “called” by divine grace, lays this obligation upon us. But there is a remarkable force in the reason here assigned; “Be ye holy; FOR I am holy.” It seems to import these three things: “Be ye holy; for without holiness you cannot *belong to me*, or *enjoy me*, or *dwell with me in my kingdom*.” I could never acknowledge an unholy person as having an interest in my favour: it would be unworthy of me: it would be to make myself a patron and partaker of his sins. Nor could an unholy being gain access to me: his very dispositions would separate him from me; and prevent his having communion with me. Nor, though he were admitted into heaven, could he be happy

^e 1 Thess. iv. 7.

^h Tit. ii. 14.

^l ver. 2.

^f Tit. ii. 11, 12.

ⁱ 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^g ver. 14.

^k Eph. i. 4.

there. He would find no one there that resembled him, or that had a like taste with him, or that could join with him in any of his pursuits. He would be out of his element altogether: nor would one in hell pant more for deliverance, to get rid of his pains, than he would for an escape from the company and occupations for which he felt no relish. Hence, when God says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy," we must understand him, not as issuing a mere arbitrary command, but as declaring, that none but a holy being has any reason to expect, or any capacity to enjoy, his favour.]

But we shall have a deeper insight into the injunction, if we consider,

II. The exhortation founded upon it—

"As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all manner of conversation." In these words the Apostle does not merely confirm the authority of the injunction itself, but points out the extent to which it is to be obeyed, and the object we must aim at in order to a full compliance with it.

We must take God himself for our pattern^m—

[The *natural* perfections of the Deity are, and ever must be, peculiar to himself: but his *moral* perfections must be possessed by us, so far as we are capable of attaining them. His goodness, his patience, his mercy, his love, his truth, his faithfulness, are all to be imitated by us; so that "what God himself is in the world, *that* are we to be alsoⁿ." That we might be at no loss on this all-important subject, the Lord Jesus Christ has "set us an example, that we might follow his steps^o:" and we are "to walk in all things as he walked^p," and to "purify ourselves even as he was pure^q." Of course, we cannot expect ever to attain his perfection: but that is no reason why we should not aim at it. There is no one point in which we should allow ourselves to fall short of it: we should strive to be holy in all things, even as God himself is holy; and "perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect^r."]]

By this must we shew that we are his people indeed—

[It is to this that "God has called us." It is the very object which he had in view, in his whole work of grace upon

^m This is the idea suggested in the original. ⁿ 1 John iv. 17.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 24. ^p 1 John ii. 6. ^q 1 John iii. 3.

^r Matt. v. 48.

our souls, even that we might be “created anew *after his image*, in righteousness and *true holiness*.” And, if our hearts be upright before God, *this* is the thing which we shall pant after, no less than after heaven itself. Sin will be our burthen and aversion; and a conformity to God will be regarded as the first object of our desire. Yea, to be “like him” will be contemplated by us as the perfection of our happiness, in “seeing him as he is^t.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet in nature’s “ignorance”—

[To exhort you to holiness were a vain attempt. You have no eyes to discern, no heart to appreciate its excellence. You must have the eyes of your understanding enlightened by the Spirit of God, before you can form any just conception of the beauty of holiness: you must have your heart of stone removed, and a heart of flesh given you, before you can be capable of bearing on you any lineaments of the Divine image. Let your first concern, therefore, be to become regenerate: for most assuredly, except ye be born again, you can never enter into, nor ever see, the kingdom of God. Remember, I say not this to those only who are openly and grossly wicked: I say it to the most moral amongst you: if you were as moral and amiable as Nicodemus himself, I would say to you, “Ye must be born again^u.” “A new heart must be given you, and a new spirit must be put within you,” ere you can have the very first principles of holiness in your souls. I pray you, therefore, to seek this first of blessings at the hands of God; and not to rest, till, through the operation of his Spirit upon your souls, “old things are passed away, and all things are become new.”]

2. Those who have been “called” out of darkness into God’s marvellous light—

[You are longing for the very blessing of which we have spoken. But in many of you there yet remains a considerable degree of ignorance respecting the appointed method of obtaining it. You are looking too much to your own exertions, and too little to the Saviour: and hence you make but little progress in the divine life. Hence, also, you obtain but little comfort in your own souls. You are ready to say, How can I be a child of God, when I bear so little of his image? and how can I venture to apply to myself his promises, whilst I am so unworthy of them. But these persons need to be informed, that they *reverse* God’s method of making his people holy. They would become holy first, and then apply to themselves

^s Eph. iv. 24.

^t 1 John iii. 2.

^u John iii. 3, 5, 7.

the promises of God: whereas they must first take to themselves the promises of God as sinners; and then, through their influence upon the soul, obtain a conformity to the Divine image. "God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that *by them* we may be made partakers of the Divine nature^x." Hence the Apostle says, "*Having therefore these promises*, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God^y." Adopt this method, then: look to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and "lay hold on him as your sure hope and refuge." First receive him in all the freeness and all the fulness of his salvation; then shall you attain the holiness you desire; and be able to say with the Apostle, "We, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image* from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^z."]

x 2 Pet. i. 4.

y 2 Cor. vii. 1.

z 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MMCCCLXXXVII.

THE NECESSITY OF HOLY FEAR.

1 Pet. i. 17. *If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*

CHRISTIANS possess many privileges by means of their relation to God; yet it is not their privileges, but their practical improvement of them, that will determine their state in the eternal world. They are called to be holy after the example of their God; and they must be conformed to his image, if they would be partakers of his glory. There will be no more partiality shewn to them than to others in the day of judgment. God will determine the fate of all by their actions; and the condition for which they are meet, shall be the condition allotted them to all eternity. St. Peter, inculcating the need of holy fear, insists upon it particularly as conducing to fit us for that strict account to which we shall all be very shortly called. In discoursing on his words we shall shew,

I. The impartiality of the future judgment—

The children of God maintain communion with God as their Father in Christ—

[The Apostle speaks of Christians as “obedient children;” and as calling upon the Father for a supply of their daily wants. This is the privilege of all true Christians; “a spirit of adoption is given them, that they may cry, Abba, Father;” and, because they are children, they may expect to receive all the glory of heaven as their inheritance — — —]

Nevertheless they will experience no partiality in the day of judgment—

[Among men it is but too common for parents to feel an undue bias in concerns relating to their children. But God has established one mode of procedure for all. His written law is the standard to which every thing shall be referred. The principles from which our actions flowed, the manner in which they were performed, and the end for which they were done, will be minutely investigated, and a sentence passed upon us according to their real quality. There will be no difference in this respect between Jew or Gentile, rich or poor; nor will any regard be shewn to men’s professions: it will be to no purpose to plead, “that they had Abraham to their Father,” or that they had “cast out devils in the name of Christ;” the one inquiry will be, Were ye holy? and according as this appears, their state will be for ever fixed.]

Interested as we are in the event of that day, let us inquire into,

II. The influence which this consideration should have upon us—

God requires us to pass our short span of life in fear—

[We are “sojourners in this world, as all our fathers were.” It is but a short time that any of us have to live, and then we shall be removed to our long home. The present state is a state of probation, a moment allotted us to prepare for eternity. Under such circumstances we should be “working out our salvation with fear and trembling.” Not that we should indulge a servile dread of God as a hard master, and a vindictive judge, but a holy reverential fear of offending him, and a tender concern to please him in all things. This is “the fear in which we should walk all the day long.”]

Nor can any thing tend more to produce this fear in us than the consideration now before us—

[Shall I be judged according to my works? Will every action, word, and thought, be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary? Will all my motives be inspected by Him, who "searcheth the heart, and weigheth the spirits?" Surely I have need to fear, lest some hidden abomination lurk within me, and lest I should be "speaking peace to my soul when there is no peace." I need be studious to please him, whose favour or displeasure are of such importance to my soul. If I must stand or fall for eternity, it becomes me to redouble my care.]

Now, methinks, you will say, 'Give me some SPECIAL DIRECTIONS, that I may know how to carry into effect the Apostle's advice.' This I will endeavour to do in four particulars.

1. Be watchful against all occasions of sin—

[Our Lord has taught us to "pray lest we enter into temptation;" for *in* temptation how rarely do we retain our integrity! Let not those pretend to fear God, who needlessly expose themselves to the assaults of Satan. If we would "keep our garments clean," we must be careful *where*, and *with whom* we walk. Does the command to "come out from the world" appear severe? it is not severe, but merciful, and necessary. If I bade you not go where the plague was raging, would you account *that* severe? May God enable all of you carefully to obey it, that you may escape infection, and live!]

2. Reflect frequently on the strictness of that scrutiny which we must undergo—

[When tempted to sin, let us not ask, What will the world say? but, How will this appear in God's eyes? How will this affect my eternal state? Apply this thought to your *duties* as well as to your temptations; How will this *service* appear when brought to the touchstone of God's law? If this be done, too many of us will have to rank their services among their greatest sins.]

3. Apply continually to the blood of Christ for pardon—

[However circumspect we be, our feet will contract some defilement in this polluted world; and "if Christ wash us not, we can have no part with him." Indeed our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of: nor is there any fountain but that of the Redeemer's blood, that can ever cleanse us. There, however, "sins even of a crimson die may be made white as snow." Let there then be no hour

wherein we do not bathe in that fountain, lest sin be found upon us in the day that we give up our account to God.]

4. Be much in prayer for the direction and assistance of the Holy Spirit—

[In vain will be all our fear and caution, if God do not both direct and uphold us: if he leave us for one moment, we fall; “without him we can do nothing.” Let us then be often praying, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Thus shall we escape the snares that are laid for our feet, and “be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom.”]

MMCCCLXXXVIII.

REDEMPTION FROM A VAIN CONVERSATION.

1 Pet. i. 18, 19. *Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

THE Christian's duty is by no means easy to be performed. It requires the exercise of much firmness and self-denial. The inspired writers, aware of this, enforce it by every consideration that can influence our minds. In the passage before us the Apostle is recommending an holy fear and jealousy lest we should be drawn back into the love of this present world. He first urges this duty from a regard to the impartial tribunal of God^a, and then from the very intent of Christ's death. This latter and most powerful argument calls for our attention at this time. To illustrate it we shall consider,

I. The extent of man's redemption—

The “conversation” of men in all ages and in all places has been the same—

[Different customs indeed have obtained in different countries: but all have walked after the imagination of their own hearts: they have prohibited such things as they thought injurious to the welfare of society, but left themselves at liberty to consult their own inclinations in every thing else. Their

practices in time formed a kind of law. What was sanctioned by one generation was followed by another. And the "conversation received by tradition from their fathers" was that which was adopted by every succeeding age.]

It is almost superfluous to observe that such conversation has been "vain"—

[Let any one ask himself what has his past conversation profited him? *Has it given him any solid satisfaction?* No; the remembrance of it cannot at all assuage the anguish of a mind bowed down with affliction, much less of a mind burthened with a sense of guilt. *Has it brought honour to God, or any real benefit to mankind?* It has been the means of almost shutting out the knowledge of God from the world; but has never honoured him in any single instance: and as for mankind, if it have in any respect advanced their temporal interests, it has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and encouraged them to walk in the broad way that leadeth to destruction.]

From this however the true Christian has been redeemed—

[It is not only from hell that the Christian is delivered, but from sin. He once indeed "walked according to the course of this world (which is the devil's course^b) fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind even as others:" but now he has seen the vanity of such a life: he proposes to himself another pattern, even Jesus, "who hath set us an example, that we should follow his steps:" he is no longer "conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of his mind." By the cross of Christ the world is become lothesome to him, even as a crucified object^c: while he is in it indeed, he performs the duties of it in a conscientious manner: but he goes into it only, as a physician into an hospital, from a sense of duty, and for the good of others; and is glad enough to retire from it to a purer atmosphere.]

He endeavours to keep before his eyes,

II. The price paid for him—

Slaves and captives are redeemed with silver and gold; but gold was of no value in the redemption of our souls—

[The whole world was not a sufficient price for one soul: it could not atone for our sin or reconcile an offended God: nor could it at all avail to change our carnal dispositions.

^b Eph. ii. 2, 3.

^c Gal. vi. 14.

Gold and silver might rivet our chains, and fix us more strongly in a vain conversation; but it could never detach us from the love of present things.]

That, which alone was of value sufficient, was,
“the precious blood of Christ”—

[The lamb that was offered daily in sacrifice to God was to be spotless and without blemish. By its blood, atonement was made for the sins of the Jewish nation; and they were preserved a holy and peculiar people. This was a typical ordinance: it represented Christ, who in due time “offered himself without spot to God:” and the benefits visibly, and in a figure, enjoyed by the Jewish nation, are invisibly, but really enjoyed by us. We have the substance of which they had the shadow. Well then might the Apostle call his blood “precious.” There is no bondage from which it does not deliver us. Were we under the curse and condemnation of the law? The blood of Christ redeems us from the penalty of all our transgressions: it gives peace to the guilty, and liberty to the captive, soul: it frees, moreover, from all the snares and entanglements of this vain world. This is mentioned both in the text and in other places as a principal end of Christ’s death^d. Precious indeed is it, when its influence is thus felt. To a true Christian the blood of Christ is not less precious as delivering him from sin, than it is as delivering him from hell itself.]

While we wonder that such a price was ever paid, let us inquire into,

III. The effect which the consideration of this price should have upon us—

The Apostle introduces the text as an argument for passing our time in fear—

[A *slavish* fear is one of those things from which we are delivered by the blood of Christ. We sprinkle that blood on our door-posts, and have no dread of the destroying angel. But there is a holy jealousy, which it is our duty ever to maintain. We are only sojourners in this world, and are hastening to our Father’s house. We are moreover in danger of being diverted from our path. We have a subtle adversary and a deceitful heart. Sin itself also is deceitful, and will beguile us, if we watch not against its wiles. We should therefore be on our guard, and pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.]

And well may this effect be produced by such a wonderful consideration—

^d Gal. i. 4.

[Were we laden with bags of gold, we should be cautious how we ventured ourselves among thieves and robbers. And shall we be careless when we carry about with us what is of more value than the whole world? Shall we trifle with that which nothing but the precious blood of God's own Son could redeem? Shall Satan as a roaring lion go about seeking to devour us, and we not stand on our guard against him? Shall we suffer him to "destroy that for which Christ died?" O let not that precious blood be so vile in our eyes. Let not our souls appear of so little value. Let us rather watch night and day. It is but a little time: soon we shall be at home; safe in the bosom of our Lord, safe beyond the reach of harm.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us inquire what we "*know*" concerning these things—

[The Apostle takes for granted that all Christians "*know*" them. But do ye *know* them? Do ye know that a worldly conversation is a vain conversation? Do ye know that no resolutions, no services, yea, nothing but the precious blood of Christ could ever redeem you from it? And do ye know by daily experience the efficacy of his blood in that view? "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith," and whether you have that deadness to the world, which alone can warrant a favourable conclusion. If ye be Christ's, "ye are not of the world, even as he was not of the world^e:" "ye are dead to it," and "have your conversation in heaven^f."]]

2. Let us labour to experience them more and more—

[There is something very fascinating in the temptations of the world. Its pleasures, riches, or honours are but too apt to draw us aside. But whenever ye are tempted, say, Shall I return to that bondage from which I have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ? Shall I trample under foot the Son of God, and crucify him afresh^g? Shall I, as it were, see his dead corpse lying in my way, and go over *that* to the gratification of my base desires? Surely such reflections will not fail to animate your resolution, and to keep you at a distance from those scenes of vanity, where your steadfastness would be endangered. Let us live as citizens of a better country, and "no more fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance^h." Let us drink of purer pleasures, even of "that river, the streams whereof make glad the *city* of God." Thus, experiencing the *full* benefits of redeeming love on earth, we shall ere long sing its praises in heaven for evermore.]

^e John xvii. 16. ^f Phil. iii. 20. ^g Heb. x. 29. ^h 1 Pet. i. 14.

MMCCCLXXXIX.

THE FATHER'S PART IN THE WORK OF REDEMPTION.

1 Pet. i. 20, 21. *Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.*

THE salvation of man is with great propriety ascribed to Christ, because he laid down his own life a ransom for us. But we shall have very imperfect views of this mystery, if we do not trace it up to God the Father, and see him concurring with Christ in every part, and performing, as it were, an appropriate office in the economy of redemption. Indeed a distinct knowledge of the Father's work is highly conducive to our progress in the divine life. This being intimated in the text, we shall endeavour to shew,

I. What part the Father bore in the work of redemption—

He ordained his Son to his mediatorial office from all eternity—

[As the prophets frequently speak of the Messiah as sent and qualified for his office by the Father^a, so our Lord himself constantly acknowledged that he received his commission from him^b. Nor was he first appointed when he became incarnate: he was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. The time of his incarnation, the manner of his death, together with every the minutest circumstance relating to him, were fixed in the Divine counsels^c. Hence he is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world^d.]

In due season he manifested his Son to the world—

[The Father prepared him a body in the Virgin's womb; and by a preternatural star conducted the Magi to him as soon as he was born. He afterwards bore testimony to him repeatedly by an audible voice from heaven, and by causing the Holy Ghost to light visibly upon him with the hovering

^a Isai. xlii. 1.

^b John viii. 28, 42.

^c Acts ii. 23. and iv. 28.

^d Rev. xiii. 8.

motion of a dove. In all the miracles which he wrought, the Father bore witness of him^e—even in the hour of his dissolution, when most of all his divine mission might seem doubtful, even then did the Father so testify of him, as to make the Centurion, who superintended the execution, exclaim, 'Truly this was the Son of God^f!']

After suffering him to be put to death, he raised him up again from the dead—

[Jesus was able to raise himself, and is often said to have risen by his own power^g. But we are expressly told here, and in many other places, that the Father also raised him^h. Indeed, as the Father, to whose justice he paid the debt, gave, as it were, the commission, by virtue of which he was imprisoned in the grave, it was necessary that he should also give him his discharge, when the demands of justice were fully satisfied. Accordingly, his restoration to life is spoken of as the strongest evidence of his Messiahship, and of his having finished that work which the Father had given him to doⁱ.]

Lastly he exalted him to heaven, and invested him with all the glory thereof—

[Jesus, in his obedience, had looked to "the joy that was set before him;" and when that obedience was fulfilled, his Father gave him the promised reward. He placed that very person, who was crucified, at his own right hand. He seated him upon his own eternal throne, and committed the government of the universe into his hands^k. He has commanded all to honour HIM even as himself; and to all eternity shall that adorable Lamb of God be the medium of his people's happiness, as he has been the Author and Procurer of it.]

That this is not a matter of mere speculation will appear, if we inquire,

II. What effect the consideration of it is intended to produce upon us?

The ultimate end, for which the Father has thus interposed on our behalf, is, to glorify himself in the salvation of man. But there are other and more immediate ends, which the knowledge of his interference is intended to accomplish :

1. It should confirm our faith—

^e John v. 36.

^g John ii. 19. and x. 18.

ⁱ Rom. i. 4.

^f Matt. xxvii. 54.

^h Acts ii. 32. iv. 10. and v. 30.

^k Phil. ii. 9—11.

[We are called particularly to believe that Christ was the true Messiah; that he performed every thing that was necessary for our salvation; and that the Father is willing to be reconciled to all who come to him by Jesus. Now it is not possible to entertain a doubt of any one of these points, if we duly consider what the Father has done for us. Would God have so frequently, and in such a wonderful manner, borne witness to Jesus if he had been an impostor? — — — Would he have liberated him from the prison of the grave, and have exalted him to glory, if the work assigned him had been left unfinished — — — Would he have sent him into the world to redeem us, and have so gloriously rewarded his services, if, after all, he were not willing to accept returning prodigals? — — — Can we suppose that God has done all these things only to mock, and to deceive us? Far be it from us to entertain the thought one moment. Let us rather conclude, that, as “it is impossible for God to lie,” so it is most injurious to him to question one jot or tittle of the record which he has given us of his Son.]

2. It should enliven our hope—

[Many are the grounds upon which we are apt to indulge fear and despondency: but there is not one, which a due consideration of what God has done would not instantly remove. Do we suppose ourselves to have been *overlooked by God*? He gave his Son to be “a propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world;” and has asserted with an oath, that he is “not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance and live.” Do we imagine *ourselves to be too vile*? “It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that he sent his Son to save *sinners*, even *the chief*.” Do we fear lest, *notwithstanding we do believe, we should by some means or other be left to perish*? Behold he has exalted his Son as our *Head*, our *Representative*, our *Forerunner*, in whom we are already accepted, and with whom we shall assuredly be glorified in due season: yea, “he has made his Son to be Head over all things to his Church,” in order that HE may put all his enemies under his feet, and secure the purchase of his own blood. Let us then yield no more to gloomy apprehensions, but ask of God the gift of his blessed Spirit, through whose powerful influence we shall both abound and rejoice in hope¹.]

In CONCLUSION let me tell you—

1. Who they are that are especially interested in this great mystery—

¹ Rom. xv. 13

[It was manifested for "*those who by Christ do believe in God*:" these are the persons interested in it, these *universally*, and these *alone*. Shew me a poor self-condemning sinner, one who under a sense of his utter guilt and helplessness comes to God through Christ, renouncing all dependence on himself, and hoping for acceptance solely through the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus, *he* is the person for whom God sent his only-begotten Son; *he* is the person for whose benefit God raised up and glorified his Son, and for whose complete salvation he has invested his Son with all power in heaven and in earth. A man who feels not his own guilt and danger has no interest in all this; nor has the man who relies in any measure on his own righteousness or strength for his acceptance with God. It is the penitent believer, and he alone, that can derive any comfort from this stupendous mystery. Dear brethren, let this sink deep into your hearts; you must come to God through Christ, and "believe in God in and by Christ." I pray you, do not forget this: for, till you come to God in this way, you have no saving faith, no scriptural hope. But, if once you be brought to this state of affiance in the Lord Jesus, whatever you may have been, or whatever you may have done, in times past, God's promises are made to you, and shall be fulfilled in you; for "they are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus." "All things are yours, if ye are Christ's; and, as Christ is God's," so shall ye be to all eternity.]

2. What more particularly this mystery speaks to *them*—

[God's design in all was, "*that your faith and hope might be in God*." This then it says to you; *Believe in God, and hope in God*. Did God fail in any thing which he had promised to his dear Son? Neither then will he fail you, if only you believe in him. Look at the Lord Jesus: see his discouragements: see him in the manger at Bethlehem: what can that infant ever do? see him in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross, and in the grave: what can be hoped for from *him*? But behold him rising from the grave, ascending to heaven, seated on his throne, and invested with all power in heaven and in earth; and then you will see what God *can* and *will* do for *you* in your most desperate condition. The power exercised for Christ is the same that is engaged for you: yea, and *the work wrought in and for Christ, is the very pattern and pledge of what shall be wrought for you*. Do I speak too strongly here? Consult the Apostle Paul: it is the very thing which he himself speaks by inspiration of God: he declares, that "the exceeding greatness of God's power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him up from the dead, and set him at his own right hand above all the princi-

palities and powers of earth and hell, is that which he will exercise towards every believing soul^m — — — Look then to God and “believe in him:” yea look at Christ Jesus, and “hope,” that, for his sake, all that has been done in and for him, shall be done in and for you. Think of nothing less: expect nothing less: be satisfied with nothing less: and, if at any time a doubting thought arise, chide your drooping spirit, as David did, and say, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? *Hope thou in God;* for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my Godⁿ.”]

^m Eph. i. 19—21.

ⁿ Ps. xlii. 11.

MMCCCXC.

LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

1 Pet. i. 22. *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.*

AS our Christian *profession* lays us under peculiar obligations to holiness, so our Christian *experience* should influence us to exert ourselves as much as possible in the service of our God. The more we have attained, the more we should aspire after still higher attainments. To this effect is St. Peter's exhortation in the passage before us. In his words we may observe,

I. What he takes for granted respecting all true Christians—

The Apostle, writing to those who professed to be followers of Christ, gives them credit that they were his disciples *indeed*; and takes for granted,

1. That they had “obeyed the truth”—

[To “obey the truth” is, in scripture-language, the same as to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The substance of the divine record is, that in Christ Jesus there is life, and that we either have life or are destitute of it, according as we possess, or are destitute of, the knowledge of Christ^a. This is the true record of God, which we are enjoined to receive with all

^a 1 John v. 11, 12.

humility and thankfulness; and when we so embrace it as to found all our hopes of salvation entirely upon it, then we may properly be said to obey the truth. Now *this* every Christian does; he does not merely give his assent to any propositions about Christ, but he “flees to Christ for refuge,” and relies upon him as his only Saviour. And the Apostle takes for granted (with good reason too) that they to whom he was writing, had *so* received Christ: for, however they might have been baptized into the faith of Christ, they were no better than mere heathens, if they had not truly believed in him.]

2. That in obeying the truth they had also “purified their souls”—

[We may cleanse the outward part of our conduct by various means. A regard to our reputation, a self-righteous desire of recommending ourselves to God, or a spirit of pride and self-complacency, will be sufficient to rectify in a measure our external behaviour; but it is the property of faith alone to purify the heart^b. And as nothing but faith will prevail for this end, so wherever faith is, it will infallibly produce this effect^c. The faith that has not this fruit is dead; and will no more avail for our salvation than the faith of devils^d. Well therefore does the Apostle take it for granted, that they, to whom he wrote, experienced this effect of their faith; seeing that it is the principal intent of the Gospel to ensure and produce it^e.]

3. That they had so purified their souls as to have attained an unfeigned love of the brethren—

[As faith purifies the heart, so in a more especial manner it “works by love^f.” The love of the brethren never was nor ever can be, found in an unrenewed soul. There may be a semblance of it; there may be a partial attachment to our own sect and party, or a carnal attachment to a person who is spiritually-minded; but there never can be a love to spiritual persons simply on account of their relation to Christ, and their conformity to his image. But let the smallest portion of true grace be imparted to the soul, and instantly will this love spring up in the heart. Many things indeed may occur in the mind to restrain its exercise for a season, and to impede its growth; but it may be taken for granted that this principle both abides and operates in the heart of every true Christian; “he that loveth him that begat, cannot but love those who are begotten of him^g.”]

^b Acts xv. 9.

^c 1 John iii. 3.

^d Jam. ii. 19, 20.

^e Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^f Gal. v. 6.

^g 1 John v. 1.

4. That they had attained all this through the influence of the Holy Spirit—

[Faith itself cannot exist in the heart, till the Spirit of God has wrought it in us: he must overcome our reluctance, and make us willing to obey the truth^h. Neither can our hearts be purified but by the same almighty power. Faith indeed is the instrument whereby our sanctification is effected; but the Holy Spirit is the agent. Every progressive step of it must be wrought by himⁱ. Our love can flow from no other source; whatever be the grace that is exercised by us, He must be acknowledged as the author of it; “it is the same Spirit that worketh all in all^k.”]

If what is here taken for granted be really found in us, nothing will be more acceptable than,

II. The exhortation grounded upon it—

“The end of the commandment,” says the Apostle, “is charity;” and our profession as Christians supposes that it exists, and operates, in our hearts. But care must be taken that it be exercised,

1. With sincerity—

[There is a politeness and civility which is only a counterfeit of Christian love: but it is not this which the text inculcates. We are indeed commanded in other parts of Scripture to “be courteous;” and it would be well if some professors of religion paid more attention to this command. But the love enjoined in the text, is an “unfeigned” love to all the saints, arising from a view of their relation to God, and to ourselves. It must be an abiding principle in our hearts, operating uniformly in the whole of our conduct towards them. It must lead us to exercise meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, and to seek both their temporal and spiritual welfare, as occasion may serve^l. In short, our love must be without dissimulation^m; it must be not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truthⁿ.]

2. With purity—

[Even where there is a portion of Christian love, there may be a considerable alloy mixed with it. We may be influenced too much by selfish considerations. We may be seeking our own interest or honour, while we imagine that we are giving a testimony of Christian love. Yea, our love which was pure at first, may easily degenerate into mere carnal affection. The greatest caution is necessary, especially among

^h Ps. cx. 3.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 13.

^k 1 Cor. xii. 7—11.

^l 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^m Rom. xii. 9.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 18.

young persons, lest our hearts betray us into indiscretion of any kind, and Satan take advantage of us to lead us into sin.]

3. With fervour—

[An empty profession of benevolence to the poor will not be deemed equivalent to an actual relieving of their wants; nor will a cold expression of regard to the brethren fulfil the sacred duty of love to them. In the latter especially, it should know no bounds, but those which were affixed to the love of Christ. Did he love us to such a degree as to lay down his life for us? we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren°. There is no service, however difficult or self-denying, which we should not render them for good. We should love one another, as the Greek word means, "*intensely*." To sum up all in one word, we should love one another, as Christ has loved us^q.]

APPLICATION—

Let us,

1. Inquire whether the things here taken for granted be found in us—

[Have we indeed received the Holy Ghost? and through his almighty influence have we believed in Christ, and purified our souls, and got a principle of holy love implanted in us? And do these attainments become so many motives to diligence, and means of spiritual advancement! Let this be duly weighed, and it will serve to shew us what we are. If we be in the faith, our self-examination will increase our comfort; and, if we be not in the faith, it may be the means of carrying conviction to the soul. Let us be assured that faith, love, and holiness universally characterize the Christian, and that our evidences of conversion will bear an exact proportion to our attainments in these things^r. Let therefore our exercise of these graces be so manifest and undeniable, that the Spirit's agency in us may be confessed by all^s.]

2. Endeavour to fulfil the duties that are here imposed on us—

[A sweeter command cannot possibly be given. To obey it is to enjoy a heaven upon earth. Heaven is a region of ineffable, unceasing love; and the more we have of that divine principle the more happy shall we be. Let us then strive to mortify whatever may retard its growth in our souls. Let us beware lest through the abounding of iniquity it wax cold. And let us strive to exercise it with all that purity and fervour which become persons so highly privileged.]

° 1 John iii. 16.

^p ἔκτενῶς.

^q Eph. v. 1, 2. John xv. 12.

^r John xiii. 35. and Isai. lxi. 9.

^s 1 John iii. 19.

MMCCCXCI.

GROWTH IN GRACE IS TO BE DESIRED.

1 Pet. ii. 1—3. *Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

A STRANGE opinion has obtained amongst some, that there is no such thing as growth in grace. But the whole tenour of Scripture, from one end of it to the other, proclaims the contrary. We will go no further than to the passage before us, and to the context connected with it. In the beginning of his epistle, the Apostle had spoken of Christians as “*begotten by God the Father to a lively hope*^a.” To stir them up to walk worthy of their high calling, he says to them, “Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, *as obedient children*; not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in your ignorance; but, as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy^b.” This injunction he enforces by a great variety of arguments. He urges, first, the consideration, that God the Father will judge them according to their works^c; then, that they have been redeemed by God the Son^d; and then, that they have been born of God the Holy Ghost, through the instrumentality of the preached word, which unalterably inculcates and requires holiness^e. From these premises he deduces the exhortation in our text: “*Wherefore, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted, (or as it should rather be translated, since ye have tasted,) that the Lord is gracious.*” Here the idea is kept up of their being children of God, though children but

^a 1 Pet. i. 3.^b 1 Pet. i. 13—16.^c 1 Pet. i. 17.^d 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.^e 1 Pet. i. 23—25.

newly born ; and they are urged to desire and feed upon that blessed provision which God has made for them in his word, and which alone can secure their growth in the divine life.

The words, thus viewed, will lead us to consider,

I. The character of God's children—

Many are the descriptions given of them in the Holy Scriptures ; but there is not one in all the inspired volume more simple or more accurate than this : “ They have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” This, I say, is,

1. Their universal experience—

[There is not a child of God in the universe to whom this character does not belong. The very instant that a child is born of God, this is his experience. Indeed it is of “ new-born babes ” that it is spoken. As to their knowledge of God, his nature, his perfections, his purposes, it may be extremely limited and imperfect. Even of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of “ the exceeding riches of God's grace as displayed in him,” they may know but little : but they have “ *tasted* that the Lord is gracious,” and they do assuredly know it by their own happy experience. If the person be young or old, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, he has learned this, and knows it, and feels it in his inmost soul. He has heard of the Saviour ; he has sought for mercy through him ; and he has received into his soul a sense of God's pardoning love and mercy in Christ Jesus : and in this he does rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. He may indeed have received *but* a taste : but a taste he has received : and it is “ sweeter to him than thousands of gold and silver.” The most uncivilized savage, when born of God, is *in this* respect on a footing with the most enlightened philosopher : he has believed in Christ ; and he “ makes Christ all his salvation, and all his desire.”]

2. Their exclusive distinction—

[Simple as this is, there is not a creature upon the face of the whole earth of whom it can with truth be predicated, but of one who has been “ begotten of God,” and “ born again of the Holy Spirit.” Others may be very wise and learned, and may be able to descant with accuracy upon all the deep things of God. They may in words and in profession greatly magnify the grace of God : but they have never had a taste of it in their own souls. And the reason is plain : they have never felt their undone state by nature : they have never been sensible of the immense load of guilt which they have

contracted by their own actual transgressions. Consequently, they have never trembled for fear of God's wrath, nor with strong crying and tears sought deliverance from it through the atoning blood of Jesus. Hence the grace of God has never been extended to them; and consequently they have never "tasted that the Lord is gracious." They, as I have before said, may descant learnedly upon the subject of divine grace; but their discussions proceed from the head only, and not from the heart. As a man who has never tasted honey, however conversant he may be with its qualities, has no just conception of its flavour, so none but he who has experienced the grace of God in his soul can know really what it is. He knows it, because he has tasted it: and others know it not, because they have not tasted it.]

The Apostle addressing these declares to them,

II. Their duty—

He teaches them,

1. What they are to put away, as injurious to their welfare—

[The unconverted man, though he may appear righteous before men, is in reality full of the most abominable evils. He may not indulge in any gross sins; but he is full of "*malice*" towards those who have injured him in any tender point; and would feel gratified, rather than pained, at any evil that should befall him. His whole converse with mankind, too, is for the most part little better than one continued system of "*guile and hypocrisy*," which are the two chief constituents of what is called politeness. If a rival surpass him in any thing on which his heart is set, and gain the honours which he panted for, he will soon find that the spirit which is in him lusteth to "envy." Moreover, whether he be more or less guarded in his general conversation, he will find in himself a propensity to "evil speaking," as if he felt himself more elevated in proportion as others are depressed. Now these dispositions are more or less dominant in the natural man, as St. Paul has strongly and repeatedly declared^f — — — and, after a person is converted to the faith of Christ, he needs to watch and pray against them with all imaginable care: for as inveterate disorders in the constitution will impede the growth, and destroy the vigour, of the body, so will these hateful dispositions "war against," and, if not subdued and mortified, prevail to the destruction of, the soul. These things therefore must be "put away."]

^f Eph. ii. 3. Tit. iii. 3.

2. What they must seek after, as conducive to their growth—

[As “the word is the incorruptible seed of which they are born^ε,” so is it the food, upon which, as “new-born babes,” they must subsist. In the inspired volume, they have truth without any mixture of error. The writings of men take partial views of things, and all more or less savour of human infirmity. Nor can the soul live upon them. If we have read a human composition two or three times, we are weary of it: but this is not the case with the word of God: *that* is ever new, and ever sweet to the taste of a regenerate soul. A little infant affects nothing so much as its mother’s breast. From day to day it prefers that before every thing else that can be offered to it: and it thrives with that, better than with any food that human ingenuity can devise. So in the “sincere” and unadulterated “milk of the word,” there is something more sweet and nutritious, than in all other books in the universe. In the inspired volume, God is presented to the soul under such endearing characters; the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in such glorious views; the precepts, the promises, the threatenings, the examples, are all so harmoniously blended; in short, truths of every kind are conveyed to the mind with such simple majesty and commanding force, that they insinuate themselves into the whole frame of the soul, and nourish it in a way that no human composition can. This therefore we should desire, in order to our spiritual growth. We should read it, meditate upon it, delight ourselves in it: we should embrace every truth contained in it; its precepts, in order to a more entire conformity to them; its promises, in order to the encouragement of our souls in aspiring after the highest degrees of holiness. In short, we should get it blended with the whole frame and constitution of our souls, so that, to all who behold us from day to day, our growth and profiting may appear: nor should we be satisfied with any attainment, till we have arrived at “the full measure of the stature of Christ.”]

Let me further IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[I am not now about to inquire, Whether you have made a great proficiency in the divine life, but Whether you have ever begun to live, or whether you are yet “dead in trespasses and sins?” In all the book of God, there is not a more simple, or more decisive test, than in the words before us. The extent of your knowledge or attainments is at present out of

the question. The only point I wish to ascertain is this; "Have you been born again?" If you have not made any progress in the divine life, are you "as new-born babes?" Have you been brought, as it were, into a new world? and are you living altogether in a new way? I do not ask whether, in "passing from death unto life," you have experienced any terrors of mind; or whether the change has been so sudden, that you can fix on the time when it commenced? but this I ask, Whether you have attained such views of Jesus Christ, that he is become truly "precious to your souls^h?" You cannot but know, that, however you may have been accustomed to call Christ your Saviour, you have not really found any delight in him in past times. But if you have been "born again of the Spirit," a change has taken place in this particular, and you have been made to feel your obligations to him, and to claim him as "the Friend, and the Beloved of your soul." I entreat you to examine carefully into this matter; for, if this change have not taken place within you, ye are yet in your sins. Oh, reflect on what our blessed Lord has so solemnly and so repeatedly affirmed; "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of Godⁱ." If you ask, What shall I do to attain this experience? I would say, Search out your sins, in order that you may know your need of Christ; and then go to him as the friend of sinners, who casts out none who come unto him. In a word, I would refer you to the words of our text, as contained in the 34th Psalm, from whence they are taken; "O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusteth in him^k."]

2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—

[You have reason, I will suppose, to believe that you have been born again; and that, though of no great stature in the divine life, you are new-born babes. If this be so, you have more reason to be thankful than if you were made possessors of the whole world: and I therefore call upon you to bless and magnify the Lord with your whole souls. But be not contented to continue in a state of infantine weakness, but seek to grow up into the stature of "young men, and fathers^l." Some imagine that, as children, they may stand excused for the smallness of their attainments; but this is a grievous error. See with what severity St. Paul reprov'd the Corinthian converts for their want of progress in the divine life. Their continuing babes in their attainments proved them to be yet carnal, instead of spiritual; and prevented his feeding them with

^h ver. 7.

^k Ps. xxxiv. 8.

ⁱ John iii. 3, 5.

^l 1 John ii. 12, 13.

stronger meat, that would have nourished and strengthened their souls^m. See also how he condemned the same in the Hebrew converts, who by their infantine weakness were incapacitated for the reception of those sublime truths, which he would gladly have imparted to themⁿ. Be afraid then of standing still in religion: for if you make not progress in it, you will speedily go backward; and if you decline from God's ways, O, how terrible will your state become! The Apostle tells us, that "if, after having *tasted* of the heavenly gift, and *tasted* of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, you fall away, it is impossible for you ever to be renewed unto repentance, seeing that you will have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame^o." Seek then to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and, by a constant attention to the suggestions in my text, so increase with the increase of God, that you may grow up into Christ in all things as your living Head, and finally attain the full measure of the stature of Christ."]

^m 1 Cor. iii. 1—4.ⁿ Heb. v. 12, 14.^o Heb. vi. 4—6.

MMCCCXCII.

THE TEMPLE A TYPE.

1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. *To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

AS in the natural life, so in the spiritual, a state of maturity is attained by a slow and gradual progression; but every one should be aspiring after a further growth in grace, in order that he may reach the full measure of the stature of Christ. For this end the Apostle exhorts those who had tasted that the Lord is gracious, to covet the sincere milk of the word; and to come continually to Christ, in order to their more abundant edification in faith and love. His allusions to the material temple are worthy of our attentive consideration: he compares Christ to the foundation-stone, and believers to the other stones built upon it; thereby shewing, that the temple had a typical reference to them,

I. In its foundation—

Christ is here represented as the foundation-stone on which all are built—

[When personally considered, Christ is represented as the temple itself, in which dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead^a: but, as considered in relation to his people, he is the foundation-stone, that supports the whole edifice^b. The quality ascribed to this stone is indeed singular; but it is perfectly suited to him of whom it is spoken. Christ is called “a living” stone, not merely as being of distinguished excellence (as he is also the “living bread,” and “living water”) but as having life in himself, and being the author of life to all who depend upon him: a quickening energy proceeds from him, which pervades and animates every part of this spiritual fabric^c.]

In this situation He is precious to all who know him—

[He has indeed in all ages been “disallowed of men,” who, blinded by Satan and their own lusts, neither “saw any beauty in him for which he was to be desired,” “nor would come to him that they might have life.” The very persons appointed to build the temple have been the first to reject him^d: they could not endure that so much honour should be put upon him; or that they should be constrained to acknowledge him as the one source of all their stability. But he was “chosen of God” from all eternity, as the only Being capable of supporting the weight of this vast edifice; and, so perfectly is he suited to his place, that “he is precious” to God, and precious to all who are built upon him. If all the angels in heaven were ordered to fill his place but for a moment, the whole building would fall to ruins: but in him there is a suitableness and sufficiency, that at once delights the heart of God^e, and inspires his people with implicit confidence.]

Nor is the foundation only of the temple typical; there is a typical reference also,

II. In its superstructure—

Believers are the stones of which the temple is composed—

[Every man, in his natural state, is as the stones in a quarry, ignorant of the end to which he is destined, and incapable of doing any thing towards the accomplishment of it. But the great Master-builder, by the instrumentality of those

^a John ii. 19—21.

^b Isai. xxviii. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^c John v. 21, 26.

^d Acts iv. 11.

^e Isai. xlii. 1.

who labour under his direction, selects some from the rest, and fashions them for the places which he intends them to occupy in this spiritual building. But, as the temple of Solomon was built without the noise of an axe or hammer, or any other tool^f, so are these brought in a silent manner^g, and “fitly framed together for an habitation of God through the Spirit^h.”]

By “coming to Christ” they are gradually built up upon him—

[Believers, quickened by Christ, become “lively,” or living “stones,” like unto Christ himself: “they live by him,” yea, he himself is their lifeⁱ. Notwithstanding therefore they have of themselves no power, through his quickening Spirit they become voluntary agents; and though it is true that they are “drawn to him by the Father^k,” yet it is also true, that they “come to him,” willingly and with strong desire. And this is the way in which “they are built up a spiritual house:” by “coming to him” they are placed upon him; and by coming to him yet again and again, they derive “more abundant life” from him; they are more and more fitted for the place they occupy; they are more closely knit to all the other parts of this sacred building, and more firmly established on him as their one foundation. It is thus that the fabric itself is enlarged by the constant addition of fresh materials; and thus that “every part of the building groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”]

A similar view must yet further be taken of the temple,

III. In its services—

The same persons, who before were represented as the stones of the building, are now, by an easy transition, spoken of as the priests officiating in it.

Believers are “an holy priesthood”—

[None could officiate in the material temple but those of the tribe of Levi: but, in the spiritual temple, all are priests, whether Jews or Gentiles, male or female: “The chosen generation are also a royal priesthood^l,” who are not only entitled, but bound, to transact their own business with God. This honour also they attain by “coming unto Christ:” by him they are “made kings and priests unto God;” and “through

^f 1 Kings vi. 7.

^h Eph. ii. 21, 22.

^k John vi. 44.

^g Job xxxiii. 15, 16. Acts xvi. 14.

ⁱ Col. iii. 4.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 9.

him they have boldness to enter into the holiest," and to present themselves before the majesty of heaven.]

Nor shall the sacrifices which they offer be presented in vain—

[They come not indeed with the blood of bulls and of goats; but they bring the infinitely more precious blood of Christ. On account of his atonement, their prayers and praises, their alms and oblations, yea, all their works of righteousness come up with a sweet savour before God, and their persons as well as services find a favourable acceptance in his sight^m. Nor though, through the infirmity of their flesh, their offerings be very imperfect, shall they therefore be despised: if only they be presented with an humble and willing mind, God, even under the law, and much more under the Gospel, has promised to accept themⁿ.]

Let us LEARN from this subject,

1. Our duty—

[Whatever be our attainments in the divine life, we have one daily and hourly employment, to be "coming to Christ:" by these means we shall be advanced and established; but, if we neglect them, we shall fall and perish. Nor must the opinions of men be of any weight when opposed to this duty: whoever despise, we must "choose" him; whoever abhor, we must account him "precious:" if the whole universe should combine against him, we must be firm in our adherence to him. Nor must we rest in cold uninfluential professions of regard. We must devote ourselves to him, while we build upon him; and present ourselves, and all that we possess, as living sacrifices unto our God and Father.]

2. Our privilege—

[Being brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ, it is our privilege to maintain fellowship with him as our reconciled God. We should banish all doubts about the acceptance of our feeble endeavours; and come, like the high-priest himself, even to his mercy-seat, there to make known our wants, and obtain the blessings we stand in need of. Methinks our state on earth should resemble, in a measure, the state of those in heaven: we should possess the same humble confidence, the same holy joy: and our sacrifices, enflamed with heavenly fire, should ever be ascending from the altar of a grateful heart, that God may smell a sweet savour, and "rejoice over us to do us good."

Thrice happy they who so walk before him! Let it be the

^m Heb. xiii. 15, 16.

ⁿ Lev. xxii. 19—23. 2 Cor. viii. 12.

ambition of us all to do so: then shall we indeed be “temples of the Holy Ghost:” we shall “draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh to us;” we shall “dwell in God, and God will dwell in us;” and the communion, begun on earth, shall be carried on and perfected in glory.]

° 1 Cor. vi. 19.

MMCCCXCIII.

THE SECURITY OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST.

1 Pet. ii. 6. *It is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*

THE Scriptures universally speak the same language with respect to Christ: in every part he is represented as the only Saviour, and the all-sufficient help of sinful man. In this respect the Old Testament prepares us for what is contained in the New, and the New reflects light upon the Old; and thus they mutually illustrate and confirm each other. This observation naturally arises from the frequent appeals made by the Apostles to the prophetic writings; and particularly from the manner in which St. Peter introduces the passage before us: he seems to intimate not only that the prophet had been inspired to declare the same truth, but that this prophecy had been given of God *on purpose* to prepare the way for the more direct injunctions of the Gospel. His words declare to us,

I. The excellency of Christ—

Christ is often spoken of as a foundation, because he supports the spiritual temple of God; but here he is represented as a corner-stone laid by the hands of God himself—

[The excellency of the chief corner-stone, which lies also at the foundation, consists in this, that while it supports the building, it also connects the different parts of it together. Now Christ has united together, not only Jews and Gentiles, but men and angels, in one spiritual building: and while they all derive their strength from him, they all feel, through him,

an union with each other^a. For this purpose “God laid” him in Sion from the beginning; he laid him, I say, in types and prophecies, and declarations, and promises; and he requires all both in heaven and earth to honour him as the one source of their strength, and the one bond of their union.]

In this view he is “elect and precious” in the eyes of God—

[God has appointed him to execute this office from all eternity, and determined that there shall be “no other name whereby any shall be saved.” And, as qualified for it, as discharging it in every respect, and as saving man in perfect consistency with the honour of the Divine perfections, God esteems him “precious;” He declares that “in this his beloved Son He is well-pleased;” and He acquiesces fully in the salvation of all who shall approve of this appointment.]

Nor will he be less precious in our eyes, if we consider,

II. The security of those who “believe in him”—

To believe in him, is, to feel an entire dependence on him ourselves, and to have such an union with him as produces a correspondent union with all the other parts of his spiritual temple. They who thus believe in him shall never be confounded,

Here—

[Much there is in their experience, which might well confound them, and which nothing but their union with him could enable them to support. How should they endure a sense of guilt, or bear up against their indwelling corruptions? How should they sustain the fiery trial of persecution, or stand composed in the near prospects of death? These are things which disconcert and confound others; and drive them like a ship from its moorings. But *they* have “an anchor both sure and steadfast.” They are not agitated, and driven to *hasty* conclusions, or *ill-advised* methods of deliverance^b. “Their heart standeth firm, trusting in the Lord.” “Being justified by faith, they have peace with God.” The promise that “sin shall not have dominion over them,” encourages their hope. Their present consolations, and future prospects of reward, soften all their trials, and enable them to “glory in tribulations.” And, knowing in whom they have believed,

^a Eph. ii. 14, 20—22.

^b Compare the text with the passage from whence it is taken, Isai. xxviii. 16.

the sting of death is taken away, and they are “delivered from their bondage to the fear of death.”]

Hereafter—

[Terrible indeed must be the apprehensions of an unbeliever, when first dismissed from the body and carried into the presence of a holy God; and at the day of judgment how will he stand appalled! But the believer will go as a child into the presence of his Father, with love, and joy, and confidence. He will not be confounded at the glory of the Divine Majesty, because he is washed in the Redeemer's blood, and clothed in his righteousness. Even Mary Magdalen, or the dying thief, know no terror in the presence of their God, because they are “complete in Christ:” it is on this account that they shall have confidence before him at his coming, and great boldness in the day of judgment^c. Nor is this the privilege of a few only, who are strong in faith, but of “all that believe,” whether their faith be strong or weak.]

INFER—

1. How great is the difference between believers and unbelievers!

[The world perhaps may not in some instances discern much difference; but God, who sees the heart, gives this glorious promise to the one, while there is no such promise in all the sacred oracles to the other. Let us then believe on Christ; and make him “all our salvation and all our desire.”]

2. How unreasonable is the unbelief of sinful men!

[God has laid his Son for a chief corner-stone in Sion, and declared him to be precious to himself in that view: why then should he not be “elect and precious” unto *us* also? Have we found a better foundation, or a surer bond of union? Or can we produce one instance wherein any person that believed in him was finally confounded? O let us consider what confusion will *probably* seize us *here*, and *certainly hereafter*, if we continue to reject him. And let us without delay “flee for refuge to the hope set before us.”]

^c 1 John ii. 28. and iv. 17.

MMCCCXCIV.

CHRIST PRECIOUS TO BELIEVERS.

1 Pet. ii. 7. *Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.*

THERE is a great difference between the views of natural and spiritual men. This exists even with

respect to things temporal; much more in those which are spiritual and eternal. It appears particularly with respect to Christ. Hence St. Peter represents him as disallowed of some, but chosen by others. This was designed of God, and agreeable to the prophecies; and it justifies the inference drawn from it in the text.

We shall,

I. Confirm this saying of the Apostle, that Christ is precious to believers—

We might suppose that Christ would be precious to all men; but he is not so. Nevertheless he is so to all that truly believe.

The history of the Old Testament affords abundant proof of this—

[Abraham rejoiced to see his day, though at a distance^a. Job delighted in the thoughts of death as introducing him to his presence^b. Moses esteemed reproach for his sake^c. David regarded nothing in earth or heaven in comparison of him^d. Isaiah exulted in the prospect of his incarnation^e. All the prophets contemplated him as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.]

The New Testament Scriptures confirm it—

[The Virgin, while he was yet in her womb, sang his praises^f— The angels congratulated the shepherds on his incarnation^g— The just and devout Simeon after seeing him, could depart in peace^h— John Baptist, as the bridegroom's friend, rejoiced in his voiceⁱ— How precious was he to that Mary who was a sinner^k— St. Paul counted all as dung for the knowledge of him, was willing to be bound, or to die for him, and knew no comfort like the expectation of being with him^l— The glorified saints and angels incessantly adore him^m—]

The experience of living saints accords with that of those who have gone beforeⁿ. The world even

^a John viii. 56.

^b Job xix. 25—27.

^c Heb. xi. 26.

^d Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^e Isai. ix. 6.

^f Luke i. 47.

^g Luke ii. 10.

^h Luke ii. 29, 30.

ⁱ John iii. 29.

^k Luke vii. 38.

^l Phil. iii. 8. Acts xxi. 13. 1 Thess. iv. 18.

^m Rev. v. 12, 13. This and all the foregoing passages should be cited in whole or in part.

ⁿ There are many to whom he is τιμή, preciousness itself; who account him as the pearl of great price, desire to know more of him, grieve that they cannot love him more, welcome every thing that leads to him, and despise all in comparison of him.

wonders at them on account of their attachment to him.

II. Account for the fact, and shew why he is so precious to them—

They have reason enough for their attachment:

They love him *for his own excellence*—

[He is infinitely above all created beauty or goodness. Shall they then regard these qualities in the creature, and not in him? Whosoever views him by faith cannot but admire and adore him.]

They love him *for his suitableness to their necessities*—

[There is in Christ all which believers can want; nor can they find any other capable of supplying their need: hence they delight in him as their “all in all.”]

They love him *for the benefits they receive from him*—

[They have received from him pardon, peace, strength, &c. Can they do otherwise than account him precious?]

We may rather wonder why all do not feel the same attachment.

III. Shew why this regard for him is found in them exclusively—

There certainly exists no reason on his part; he is good to all. But unbelievers cannot love him:

1. Because they have no views of his excellency—

[The god of this world has blinded them that they cannot see him^o. How then should they esteem him, whose excellency they know not? They must of necessity be indifferent to him, as men are to things of little value.]

2. Because they feel no need of him—

[Christ is valuable only as a remedy^p; nor can any man desire him as a physician, a fountain, a refuge, unless he feel some disease, some thirst, some danger.]

APPLICATION—

[All, who have any spiritual discernment, feel a love to Christ: he is beloved of the Father, of angels, and of saints.

^o 2 Cor. iv, 4.

^p Isai. xxxii. 2.

None but devils and unbelievers despise him; and shall any, who do not account him precious, be objects of his regard? Surely his final decision will correspond with that declaration^a.— Let all then believe in him, that he may become precious to them; nor let any be dejected because they cannot delight in him as they wish. The more we love him, the more shall we lament the coldness of our love. In a little time all the powers of our souls shall act without controul. Then shall we glory in him with unrestrained and unabated ardour.]

^a 1 Sam. ii. 30.

MMCCCXCV.

THE DIFFERENT STATES OF BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS.

1 Pet. ii. 7—10. *Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*

THERE is a great and manifest difference put between men in respect to the advantages they enjoy, and the endowments they possess. Some are born to great possessions, while others from their birth experience nothing but penury and want. Some are blessed with a strength of intellect, that qualifies them for the deepest researches; while others are so limited in their capacities, that they can scarcely comprehend the plainest and simplest things. A still greater difference obtains in respect to the opportunities which men have for spiritual instruction. As of old, the light of divine truth was confined to one single nation, so, at this present moment, there is but a small part of the world who hear any thing of Christ, and a very small part indeed to whom the

Gospel is preached in its purity. Such being unquestionably the dispensations of God's providence, we must not wonder if a similar exercise of sovereignty appear in the dispensations of his grace. To draw the precise limits, where human agency concurs with the operations of God's Spirit, or where it resists and frustrates them, is beyond our power; but of this we may be well assured,—that all evil is from man; all good from God. We shall have strong evidence of this in the passage before us; in which we see the difference that exists between different men,

I. In their regard for Christ—

Mankind may be divided into two classes; believers, and unbelievers.

Now of all the things which may serve to distinguish these, there is none more decisive than their different regard to Christ.

To the believer, Christ is “precious”—

[We need not enter into *all* the grounds of a believer's love to Christ: suffice it to say, that he feels himself indebted to Christ for all his hopes in this life, and for all his prospects in the next. He has washed in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, and has been cleansed by it from all sin: he has lived by faith on the Son of God, and has received out of his fulness all needful supplies of grace and peace. Hence he looks upon Christ, not merely as a friend and benefactor, but as a Saviour from death and hell. He esteems him, not only as precious, but as preciousness^a itself. In comparison of him, all other things are considered as dung and dross^b.]

To the unbeliever, Christ is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence”—

[Unbelief and disobedience are so nearly allied, that they are, in the Greek language, expressed by the same word^c. Indeed unbelief is the highest act of disobedience; for “this is God's commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ^d.”

To exercise faith on Christ is the duty of all. He is “the stone which is laid in Zion,” and on which we are to build all

^a τιμή.

^b Phil. iii. 8.

^c ἀπειθεία. Compare Rom. xi. 32. with Eph. ii. 2.

^d 1 John iii. 23.

our hopes. But “the builders themselves, the heads of the Jewish Church, rejected him:” and notwithstanding “he is become the head of the corner,” “the disobedient” still reject him. It was foretold that this would be the treatment shewn him by the generality^e: and the event has fully justified the prediction. The grounds indeed on which men reject him, are altered; but their conduct towards him is the same as was observed in the days of old. The Jews were offended at his mean appearance, and his high pretensions; and particularly at his professing to supersede the Mosaic law: and, on these accounts, they crucified him as an impostor. We on the contrary, profess to honour him as the true Messiah; but are offended at the salvation which he has revealed: we think it too humiliating in its doctrines, and too strict in its precepts: we cannot endure to give him *all* the glory of our salvation: nor can we submit to walk in those paths of holiness and self denial which he has trodden before us. On these accounts many reject his Gospel: they cry out against it, as discouraging the practice of good works, as opening the very flood-gates of iniquity, and (strange as the contradiction is) making the way to heaven so strait and difficult that no one can walk in it. Thus, instead of building on Christ as the foundation-stone, they make him only “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence^f.”]

How far this is to be traced to any antecedent purposes of God, will appear more distinctly, while we mark the difference between them,

II. In their states before God—

In the words of the text there is a double antithesis, which is rather obscured by the present translation, but which should be noticed in order to a clear understanding of the passage^g.

“*These* (the unbelievers) stumble at the word being disobedient”—

[In what manner they stumble at the word, has been already noticed. We must now endeavour to trace their stumbling to its proper causes.

It is certainly, in the first instance, owing to their own

^e Ps. cxviii. 22.

^f Isai. viii. 14.

^g The words in Italics, ver. 8. should be left out; and ‘*Oi*’ be translated “*these*.” The double antithesis will then be clear:—‘*Υμῖν*, he is precious; ἀπειθοῦσι δὲ, he is a stumbling-block. *Oi*, *these*, stumble *through their own depravity*; ‘*Υμεῖς* δὲ, enjoy your privileges as a *chosen* generation.

“disobedience.” Men are filled with pride, and are unwilling to embrace any sentiment that tends to abase them. They are also full of worldly and carnal lusts, which they cannot endure to have mortified and subdued. In short, their prejudices and their passions are altogether adverse to the Gospel: so that, when the word is preached to them, they instantly set themselves against it. In vain are proofs adduced; in vain are motives urged; in vain are all human efforts to conciliate their regard to Christ: the language of their hearts is, “I have loved strangers, and after them will I go^h.” The contempt which the Pharisees poured on Christ, on account of his prohibiting the love of money, is traced by the Evangelists to this very source; “The Pharisees were covetous, and they derided himⁱ.” And our Lord expressly recommends obedience as the best preparative for receiving the knowledge of his Gospel; “If any man will do God’s will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God^k.”

But, according to the words of the text, it seems as if men’s unbelief was to be traced ultimately to the decrees of God respecting them. We cannot however understand them as establishing so awful a doctrine: nay, we cannot think that the doctrine of *absolute reprobation* can ever be established, while those words remain in the Bible, “As I live, saith the Lord God; I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner^l.” Nevertheless we are not disposed to explain away the words of the text; for they certainly have a very awful and important meaning, to which it becomes us to attend. God has decreed, that they who will not receive the Gospel for the illumination of their minds, shall eventually be blinded by it; that they who are not softened by it, shall be hardened^m; that they to whom it is not “a savour of life unto life, shall find it a savour of death unto deathⁿ.” The Gospel is certainly so constituted, that it shall produce these effects. Christ is “set for the fall, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel^o.” “He is for a sanctuary,” to protect and save the humble; but he is also “for a stone of stumbling,” yea, “for a gin and a snare, that many (even all that are proud, perverse, and obstinate) may stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken^p.”]

“But *ye*” (believers) are exalted to the highest privileges by the Gospel—

[The various terms here used were originally intended to mark the privileges of the Jewish nation^q: but they are

^h Jer. ii. 25.

ⁱ Luke xvi. 14.

^k John vii. 17.

^l Ezek. xxxiii. 11. ^m Isai. vi. 9, 10.

ⁿ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^o Luke ii. 34.

^p Isai. viii. 14, 15.

^q Exod. xix. 6. Deut. vii. 6.

applicable to believers in a higher and more appropriate sense.

Believers are “a chosen generation:” they have been “chosen of God from before the foundation of the world^r.” Though the misery of unbelievers is owing, not to any absolute decrees of reprobation, but to their own pride and wickedness, we must not imagine that the happiness of believers is owing to their own inherent goodness: for they have no good qualities which they have not first received from God^s; and consequently their good qualities are the effect, not the cause, of God’s kindness to them. Though therefore we cannot accede to the doctrine of reprobation, we have no doubt whatever on the subject of election; since both by Scripture and experience it is established on the firmest grounds.

Believers are also “a royal priesthood:” they are now made both “kings and priests unto God^t.” They are chosen of God to reign over their own lusts, and to have the nearest access to him in all holy duties. There is no difference now between Jew and Gentile, or between male and female: but all are permitted to approach unto the mercy-seat of their God, and to offer to him the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise.

Moreover, they are “a holy nation, and a peculiar people.” All are united under the same King; all obey the same laws; all participate the same interests. They are all separated by God, and “set apart for himself:” they are not *of* the world, though they are *in* it: they are mere “pilgrims and sojourners” here; and are travelling to “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

All these distinctions they enjoy; and they owe them all to the sovereign grace of God.]

ADDRESS—

1. Unbelievers—

[You need only to examine your regard for Christ, and you will soon find with which class you are to be numbered. You may easily discover whether Christ be supremely precious to your souls, or whether you are averse to the doctrines and precepts of his Gospel.

Think with yourselves, what guilt you contract, and to what danger you are exposed, while you remain insensible to all the love of Christ: your guilt is greater than that of the very persons who crucified him, because you sin against greater light, and contradict your most solemn professions. O provoke not God to give you over to judicial blindness; nor make

^r Eph. i. 4.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^t Rev. i. 6.

God's richest mercy an occasion of your more aggravated condemnation!]

2. Believers—

[You see in the latter part of the text how infinitely you are indebted to your God: once you were in darkness; now you are "brought into the marvellous light" of his Gospel: "once you were not the people of God; now you are: once you had not obtained mercy; now you have obtained mercy."

And for what end has God vouchsafed to make this alteration in your state, and to distinguish you thus from millions, who are still left in the very condition in which you so lately were? Was it not "that you should shew forth the praises, yea *the virtues*"^u too, of Him that called you?" Entertain then a becoming sense of your obligations: and endeavour to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits" conferred upon you. Shew forth *his praises* by frequent and devout acknowledgments; and shew forth *his virtues* by following his steps and obeying his commandments.]

^u ἀρετὰς.

MMCCCXCVI.

SUBJECTION TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

1 Pet. ii. 13—17. *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

THE great duty of a Christian minister is, to exalt the Saviour, and to call men to submit to his government. But we must not imagine that this is neglected, when our minds are led to the consideration of human governments, and the duties we owe to them: for there is a manifest connexion between the two subjects; the latter being, in reality, a branch of the former. We cannot truly submit to Christ, unless we yield obedience to *all* his laws—to those which relate to our conduct in civil life, as well as

those which are given to regulate the inmost workings of our souls towards God. And we should be essentially wanting in our duty as Christian pastors, if we did not take occasion, especially from the interesting events of this day^a, to open to you a subject of such great and universal importance. The words which I have read will lead me to shew you,

I. Our duty in relation to civil government—

Civil government is an ordinance of God—

[It is called, in my text, “an ordinance of man:” and so it is, as far as relates to the particular *form* of government established in any particular kingdom. In some countries absolute monarchy is established: in our own, a limited monarchy. In some, there are republics; in others, the power is vested in an aristocracy. In fixing the precise mode in which the affairs of any nation shall be administered, the agency of *man* has been altogether employed: God having never interposed by an authoritative mandate from heaven, except in the case of the Jewish people. The history of our own nation sufficiently informs us, that the changes which take place in human governments are the result of human deliberation, or of human force. Yet, in *its original appointment*, civil government proceeds from God himself. He has ordained, that man shall not be left in the state of the brute creation, every one independent of his fellow, and every one at liberty to follow the bent of his own inclinations, without any regard to the welfare of others: but that power shall be vested in some for the good of the community; and that every one shall be responsible to that power for his own conduct, as far as the welfare of the community is concerned. St. Paul expressly tells us, that “there is no power, but of God; and that the powers that be, are ordained of God^b.”]

To it we are to submit, “for the Lord’s sake”—

[Power must, of course, be delegated to a great variety of persons, and in different degrees: and to it, in whomsoever it is vested, or in whatsoever degree, we are to yield that measure of submission which the laws require. We owe allegiance, primarily, “to the king, as supreme;” and, subordinately, to all other classes of magistrates or governors, who are appointed by him for the exercise of his authority in their respective jurisdictions. The obedience which we are to pay

^a The *Coronation* of George the Fourth, July 19, 1821. But it might be applied to the King’s *Accession*, or 30th of January.

^b Rom. xiii. 1.

may be rendered more easy, or more difficult, by the personal character of him who exacts it: but it is due, not to the *man*, but to the *office*; and therefore it must be paid, even though the man who executes the office may be far from deserving the homage he requires. If only we recollect that Nero was the governor of the Roman empire at the time that the Apostle wrote his epistle to the Church at Rome; and that towards him, notwithstanding his great cruelty and his bitter persecution of all who bore the Christian name, the Apostle required all to shew the utmost reverence and submission; we shall see that there is no room for any person to withhold allegiance from the reigning monarch on account of any thing that there may be offensive in his personal character. The words of the Apostle are most decisive on this point: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power, but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power," even though it be exercised by a very Nero, "resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation^c." Nor does this observation extend to the supreme governor alone; but to all, according to the measure of authority that is vested in them: and it is not only from fear of their displeasure that we are to render them this homage, but "for conscience' sake^d," or, as my text expresses it, "for the Lord's sake."]

How "the Lord" is interested in our performance of this duty, will appear, whilst we consider,

II. The grounds and reasons of it—

We are bound to yield submission to civil government because of,

1. Its being altogether of God's appointment—

[The institution of government is from him, as has already been shewn. Moreover, the power that is exercised by earthly governors is God's authority delegated to men, who are constituted his vicegerents upon earth. It is not *man* therefore, but *God*, whom we are called to obey: it is *God*, I say, *in the person of the civil magistrate*^e. We are to "submit" ourselves to man; "for so is the will of God:" and, in rendering to man the service that is due, we are to consider ourselves, not as the servants of *men*, but "as the servants of *God*."

What need we further than this, to evince the indispensable necessity of submitting to civil government, and of obeying implicitly the laws which are enacted by the constituted

^c Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

^d Rom. xiii. 5.

^e Numb. xvi. 11 1 Sam. viii. 7. with Rom. xiii. 4.

authorities of the realm? If we are to obey God in the duties of the first table, so are we in those of the second also: and if, "*for the Lord's sake,*" we are to submit ourselves to the *religious* ordinances of *God*, so are we, with equal readiness, *for his sake,* to submit ourselves to every *civil* ordinance of *man*.]

2. Its conduciveness to the public welfare—

[Though authority may not always be *exerted* for the best ends, it is *committed* to men solely with a view to the public good. It is ordained for the restraining and "punishing of evil-doers," and for the protection and "benefit of those who do well." I need not occupy your time with shewing how great a mercy it is to live under an equitable and active magistracy, who are engaged in enforcing the observance of the laws. Let us suppose only that the laws were suspended through the land for the space of three days, and that every one were left to follow the bent of his own will without fear and without restraint: what misery, even during that short space of time, would pervade the whole kingdom! What scenes of rapine, and violence, and lust, and cruelty, would pervade the whole country! Who would not be crying out for the restoration of legitimate authority, and bless God the very moment that he was permitted once more to experience the benefits of civil government? Who would not then feel happy in discharging his duty to that government, by a just payment of tribute and of custom, for the support of the legitimate authorities, and of the public weal? Then should we need no arguments to prove, that partial restraint is universal liberty; and that true freedom can be found only in such an exercise of our powers, as will consist with the freedom and happiness of all around us.]

3. Its tendency to recommend religion—

[God has special respect to this; as we should have also: "It is His will" that we should fulfil this duty, "that by well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." The Jews were generally considered, and with great justice too, as averse to civil government, especially as maintained by heathens. They had received a civil code from God himself: and they could not endure that any thing should be withdrawn from it, or added to it. They had also been under a Theocracy^g; even their kings being, as subordinate magistrates,

^f An awful picture of this state, when there was no king in Israel, "but every one did that which was right in his own eyes," may be seen in Judg. xvii. 5—10. xix. 1, 2, 22—30. xx. 1—48. and xxi. 1—25. A juster picture cannot be conceived.

^g 1 Sam. xii. 12.

appointed by him. They judged, therefore, that all other authority was an usurpation; and they were ready at all times, if possible, to throw off a foreign yoke. This being the known character of the Jews, (though it was in direct opposition to the command which God himself had given them, to “seek the peace of the cities to which they should be carried captive, and to pray for them^h,”) it was supposed that the same character attached to them after they became Christians, and that, in fact, it was the habit of the whole Christian world. It was in vain that Christians denied this imputation: their enemies were ignorant, wilfully ignorant, of their principles; and continued, in spite of all remonstrances, to load them with this reproach. ‘Now,’ says the Apostle, ‘it is the will of God that you should cut off all occasion for this calumny; and though you cannot hope to convince “ignorant” people, who do not *know*, and “foolish” people, who will not *learn*, yet you may, “by well-doing, put them to silence;” and so “muzzleⁱ” their ignorance and folly, that they may not be able to open their mouths against you.’

This should be an object near to the heart of all the Lord’s people; and they should labour to accomplish it, “for the Lord’s sake.”]

After viewing your duty in this light, you will be prepared to consider,

III. The manner in which it should be performed—

It should be performed,

1. With integrity of mind, as unto the Lord—

[Christians were “free,” and had a right to assert their freedom. But, from what were they free? from obedience to civil magistrates? from those bonds which hold all society together? No: God forbid. They are, in these respects, under the same restraints as all other people under heaven. But, as Christians, they were free from the yoke of bondage, to which they had been subject in their Jewish state; and the command of God to them was, “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage^k.” In like manner, those who had been converted from heathenism were freed from the various superstitions which, under their former state, they had been bound to observe: and though they should be under heathen governors, yet were they absolved from all allegiance to them in this respect, being now placed under the higher authority of God himself. Daniel, and the Hebrew Youths

^h Jer. xxix. 7.

ⁱ φιμῶν.

^k Gal. v. 1.

had done well in resisting the authority that would have kept them from honouring the true God, or have compelled them to transfer his honour to any created object. And the Apostles, when forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus, did well in answering, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you, more than unto God, judge ye¹." The same liberty is transmitted to us also^m: and from whatever quarter a command may come, to omit what God enjoins, or to do what he forbids, our answer must be, "We ought to obey God rather than menⁿ." But we must be careful not to make this liberty of ours "a cloak for wickedness,^o" and, under pretence of asserting our Christian liberty, to withhold from our civil governors that reverence which is their due. This is an observation of vast importance. There is in the human mind a restlessness and impatience of controul: there is also a proneness to enlarge or contract the bounds of duty, and the consequent demands of conscience, according as interest or inclination may bias our minds. Who does not *see this as exhibited in others?* and who has not reason to suspect this, *as harboured in himself?* I am well aware that this is a delicate subject, and especially when promulgated amongst persons who live under a free constitution, and have been taught to venerate the very name of liberty with an almost idolatrous regard. But the caution is the more necessary, on that very account: for, in proportion as we are tenacious of liberty, we are in danger of transgressing the bounds which God has prescribed, and of deluding ourselves with an idea, that we are only exercising the rights of British subjects, when we are, in fact, indulging a restless and factious spirit; a spirit, which, *if it were opposed to us*, we ourselves should be the foremost to condemn: for there are no persons more ready to cry out against the exercise of liberty in others, than those who are most clamorous for the maintenance of it in themselves. Let the Apostle's caution, then, be well received, and duly attended to. We are all concerned to "know what spirit we are of," and to do that only which God himself will approve: and let me not be thought to be advocating the cause of a party, whilst I declare what is really and truly the mind of God. We are greatly exposed to self-deception in this matter. And we have seen it prevailing, to a very awful extent, in this kingdom, not only at the time of the French revolution, but at more recent periods. We have seen religious persons uniting with those who were openly regardless both of God and man, and with an unhallowed zeal countenancing the most lawless

¹ Acts iv. 19.

^m That Christians are free from guilt and condemnation, and from the power of sin, is all true; but nothing to the present purpose.

ⁿ Acts v. 29.

^o κακίας.

proceedings. Surely, if the true character of God's people be, that they are "the quiet in the land^p," these persons would do well to consider whether they are not carried by a party-spirit beyond what Christ or his Apostles ever practised, or ever sanctioned, and whether they would not honour their profession more by attending to the caution given them in my text. And I the rather say this, because religion has of late been grievously scandalized by the departure of multitudes from Christian duty in this particular.]

2. With an harmonious attention to all other duties—

[In all Christian duties there is a perfect harmony: no one of them is in any degree opposed to any other. In the pursuits of earthly men, it is necessary to check one propensity, in order to indulge another. A man who is ambitious, and yet covetous, must sacrifice, in a measure, his love either of honour or of wealth; because the line he must pursue in the prosecution of the one, must impede him in the pursuit of the other. But the Christian, in the performance of his duties, finds no such counteracting influence: he may serve God in the utmost perfection, and yet not be defective in any duty which he owes to man. Let no duty then be neglected: but, as all are compatible with submission to civil government, so, if performed in their proper manner, they will all contribute to advance, rather than obstruct, the best possible execution of our social obligations.]

"Honour all men." There is no man who does not claim at our hands a measure of respect. Those who excel in wisdom and goodness are doubtless entitled to a larger share. But even the most unworthy object is not to be despised; forasmuch as he was "made after the similitude of God^q," and has been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, and may, for aught that we know, become a child of God, and an heir of his eternal glory.

Yet, doubtless, we must with a more especial affection "love the brotherhood." The saints, to whatever nation or sect they belong, ought to be dear to us: for with God there is no respect of persons: there is neither Jew, nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free; but all are regarded as one in Christ Jesus^r. They are all members of his mystical body, yea, "members one of another^s:" and though we are to "do good unto all men," there is a special obligation upon us to do good unto "them that are of the household of faith^t." Towards the world we should feel a love of benevolence: but

^p Ps. xxxv. 20.

^q Jam. iii. 9.

^r Gal. iii. 28. Col. iii. 11.

^s 1 Cor. xii. 12. Eph. iv. 25.

^t Gal. vi. 10.

towards the saints, a love of complacency. We are united to them in the closest bonds; and should "love them with a pure heart, fervently" and intensely^u.

We must "fear God" also. Our regards must not be confined to man: they must soar upwards to God; and be fixed on him supremely. We must *love* man; but not *fear* him: whereas God must be the object both of love and fear. Nothing under heaven must induce us to displease him. All the creatures in the universe are to be withstood, if they enjoin what is contrary to his revealed will: for his commands are of paramount obligation; and life itself must be sacrificed rather than the least of them be violated by us. If, however, so painful a necessity arise as that of disobedience to an earthly governor, we must shew clearly, in the whole of our conduct, that our opposition is the offspring, not of a contentious mind, but of a pious regard to superior authority.

Together with all this, we must "honour the king." Whatever is good in him, we must delight to applaud: and, if there be any thing in him of human infirmity, we must readily cast a veil over it, and make due allowance for the temptations with which he is surrounded, and for the weaknesses of our common nature. Viewing him as God's representative, we must honour him in our hearts; and be ready to shield him against every adversary, and to concur with him in all his endeavours for the welfare of his people. If he appear disposed to exceed the powers which are assigned to him by law, we are not to indulge in strains of querulous invective: for even "against the devil himself would not Michael bring a railing accusation; but temperately said, The Lord rebuke thee^x." And, if an archangel so restrained the emotions of his mind, much more should *we*, who are expressly enjoined "not to despise dominion, or to speak evil of dignities." Whatever methods of redress the constitution prescribes, we may certainly use: but we should use them, not in a spirit of clamorous opposition, but in the spirit of Him "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously^y."

In a word, we are to maintain an harmonious regard to all our duties; compromising none, forgetting none. We must be conscientiously intent on all; "rendering unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's^z."]]

I cannot close this subject better than by desiring you all devoutly to unite with me in the following prayer—

^u 1 Pet. i. 22. the Greek.

^y 1 Pet. ii. 23.

^x Jude, ver. 8, 9.

^z Matt. xxii. 21.

“Almighty God, whose kingdom is everlasting, and power infinite, have mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant * * * * our king and governor, that he, knowing *whose minister he is*, may above all things seek thy honour and glory: and that we, and all his subjects, duly considering *whose authority he hath*, may faithfully serve, honour, and obey him, *in thee*, and *for thee*, according to thy blessed word and ordinance, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

MMCCCXCVII.

HOW TO BEAR INJURIES.

1 Pet. ii. 19—23. *This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

THE practical nature of the Gospel meets us through every part of the New Testament, from the beginning to the end. Our Lord's sermon on the mount was wholly of this character; as are also his addresses to the seven Churches of Asia, in the book of Revelations. Nor are the epistles, which were written by different Apostles, at all different in their scope and tendency: they do indeed insist more on doctrines: but yet the preceptive parts of them are singularly minute and full; and are distinctly addressed to persons in every situation and relation of life. The passage before us is a peculiar address to servants, to shew them how they are to conduct themselves towards their masters, who shall be embittered against them for embracing the Gospel of Christ.

But the Apostle did not intend this instruction to be limited to servants; for, in the close of the chapter, he extends it to all, who “like sheep have gone astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.”

His words suggest,

I. A precept for our observance—

It is here taken for granted that persons in every age will be persecuted for righteousness' sake—

[And the whole history of mankind fully justifies this assumption: for from the time of Abel to the present hour it has been verified. The lovers of darkness hate the light; and will endeavour, when it lies in their power, to extinguish it^a. The whole life of David tends to illustrate this: “They that render evil for good are mine adversaries,” says he; “because I follow the thing that good is^b.” And what shall I say of him who was greater than David, even the Son of God himself? Surely his wisdom precluded a possibility of any fault being found with him; whilst his goodness suppressed, in every bosom, a disposition to find fault. But this was by no means the case: on the contrary, in proportion to his superiority above all the sons of men, was the inveteracy of the carnal mind against him. Can *we*, then, hope to escape their malignity? No; “The disciple cannot be above his Master, or the servant above his Lord: if they have hated him, they will hate us also^c :” we, like him, must have our cross to bear^d: and “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution^e.”]

But, whatever be our trials, and however undeserved, we must “take them patiently”—

[“We are called to them” by God himself; who has wisely and graciously “appointed^f,” that, by means of them, our graces should be both elicited and improved, and our fidelity to him be placed beyond a doubt. He has ordained too, that by means of these trials, glory shall accrue to him, and everlasting good to our own souls. They give to us an opportunity of shewing how highly we regard his favour, when, for his sake, we are willing to endure all that men or devils can inflict upon us. They display, at the same time, the power of his grace, which can uphold us under such circumstances; and the excellency of his religion, which shines

^a John iii. 19.

^c Matt. x. 24. John xv. 18.

^e 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^b Ps. xxxviii. 20.

^d Luke xiv. 26, 27.

^f 1 Thess. iii. 3.

so bright in contrast with the spirit and conduct of our ungodly persecutors. They are the means, too, of augmenting our happiness in the eternal world; since there is not a sacrifice which we are called to make, or a suffering to endure, which shall not be richly recompensed at the resurrection of the just^g.

If it be said, that it is an intolerable hardship to suffer, when we have given no occasion whatever for man's displeasure; I answer, your innocence should operate rather to lighten, than to aggravate, your affliction; since it administers sweet consolation to your own soul, and serves as a testimony in your behalf before God. If your punishment were merited, you would have no ground for approbation, either before God, or in your own minds, for submitting patiently to it: but, if you suffer patiently for well-doing, you evince a truly gracious disposition, and render an acceptable service to your God.

This, then, we are to consider as a precept given to us, under whatever injuries we may be called to sustain: we must "possess our souls in patience^h;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothingⁱ."]]

To this precept the Apostle adds,

II. An example for our imitation—

Not one of all the children of men was ever so blameless as our Lord Jesus Christ—

["In him was no sin^k;" "nor was any guile found in his mouth^l." He appealed even to his bitterest enemies; "which of you convinceth me of sin^m?" With all the disposition to criminate him that the most inveterate malignity could cherish, his accusers were all put to shame, and his judge proclaimed his innocenceⁿ.]

Yet, never was man so evil-entreated as he—

[Scarcely was he come into the world, before his life was sought; and for the sake of securing, at all events, his destruction, thousands of poor innocents were slain. During the four years of his ministry, there was nothing too malignant for his enemies to say concerning him: "He was a deceiver^o:" He was "a devil, and was mad^p." The efforts made to take away his life were continual: and the more good works he did, the fiercer was men's rage against him: nor did his enemies rest, till they had attained their end, and nailed him to the accursed tree.]

^g 1 Pet. iv. 12—16.

^h Luke xxi. 19.

ⁱ Jam. i. 3, 4.

^k 1 John iii. 5.

^l Isai. liii. 9.

^m John viii. 46.

ⁿ Luke xxiii. 4.

^o Matt. xxvii. 63.

^p John vii. 20. viii. 48. and x. 20.

But how did he conduct himself under his trials ?

[Not so much as one hasty word escaped him ; nor one angry feeling betrayed itself in him : “ when he was reviled, he reviled not again : when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” Truly “ he was as a lamb led to the slaughter ; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth^a.”

In all this, he was an example to us : “ He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps.” He submitted to all those indignities, *on purpose* that he might shew us how to act under similar trials : and God permits us to be brought, in some small degree, into similar circumstances, *on purpose* that we may “ be conformed to his image^r,” and be “ made perfect in the very same way ” that he was^s, and enter into glory by the very same path^t. To this, then, must our minds be made up : we must be willing to endure sufferings for well-doing ; to submit to them, however great they be, with unruffled patience ; and to “ commit ourselves to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator^u.”]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. How we are to regard the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Many who profess to believe, and even to preach, the Gospel, confine their views of Christ almost exclusively to him as dying for our sins, or as reigning in glory to carry on and perfect his work in our behalf. This, doubtless, is a most important view of him : it is the very foundation of all our hopes. Yet is it by no means a complete view : and they who confine themselves to it are greatly deceived : and, whether willingly or not, they grievously dishonour him. He must be regarded as an example : nor is he less glorious in that view, than in any other. Nay, if we omit to regard him in that light, we suffer an irreparable loss.

Would we know what treatment we must expect, if we will faithfully serve our God ? Look at HIM. Not all the wisdom of his lips, nor all the blamelessness of his deportment, nor all the wonders which he wrought, could avert from Him the hatred, the contempt, the cruelty, of an ungodly world. Who then are *we*, that *we* should hope to escape these things ?

Would we know how to conduct ourselves under sufferings inflicted on us for righteousness' sake ? Look at HIM. Behold his meekness, his patience, his long-suffering, and forbearance ; yea, and hear him praying for his very murderers : and then say, whether this be not the spirit that becomes you.

^a Isai. liii. 7. ^r Rom. viii. 29. ^s Heb. ii. 10. and v. 8.

^t 1 Pet. iv. 19. ^u Heb. xii. 1, 2.

Would we know the issue of such a life? Look at HIM; and see him seated at the right hand of God, and all his enemies become his footstool. Such shall be the end of all who tread in his steps: “having suffered with him, they shall surely reign with him^x.”

Take him then, beloved, as your example; and be content to “suffer with him, that you may also be glorified together^y.”]

2. How we are to approve ourselves his faithful servants—

[If we are to bear injuries from others, we must, beyond all doubt, be “*good and gentle*” ourselves; “shewing all meekness to all men:” and, however injured by others, we must endure unto the end. We must not draw back through fear of sufferings; or faint under them, when they are inflicted on us. If we enlist under the banners of an earthly prince, we expect to fight his battles: we do not, when we hear of an enemy, desert and hide ourselves. We do not, when we meet him in the field, lay down our arms. We rather gird ourselves to the fight, and say, ‘Now is the time for me to display my zeal in the cause I have espoused, and my fidelity to him whom I have engaged to serve.’ Thus, then, must you do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You must not be ashamed of wearing, if I may so speak, his uniform; and of shewing, in the face of the whole universe, on whose side you are.

Yet, remember that it is with his armour only that you must go forth to the battle. You must “be armed with righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” Your breast-plate, in particular, must be of that material: “your helmet must be the hope of salvation;” and your sword, “the sword of the Spirit, the word of God^z.” It was “by death that the Lord Jesus Christ overcame death^a;” and it is “by patiently enduring, that you also must obtain the promise of an eternal inheritance^b.” Keep, then, your eyes fixed on the “Captain of your salvation;” and, “being faithful unto death, you shall receive at his hands the crown of life^c.”]

^x 2 Tim. ii. 12.

^a Heb. ii. 14.

^y Rom. viii. 17.

^b Heb. vi. 15.

^z Eph. vi. 14—17.

^c Rev. ii. 10.

MMCCCXCVIII.

THE VICARIOUS SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

1 Pet. ii. 24. *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed.*

AN attentive reader of the New Testament cannot but have observed, that there is one subject in particular to which the Apostles frequently recur, and on which they delight pre-eminently to dwell : and *that* is, the great work of redemption. St. Paul scarcely ever has occasion to mention the name of Christ, but he digresses from his main subject, to indulge the feelings of his heart in expatiating upon the glory and excellency of his Divine Master. It is the same with the Apostle Peter. He has been speaking to servants ; and instructing them to bear with meekness and patience any injuries that may be inflicted on them for the Gospel's sake : and he has proposed to them the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose patience, under the most painful sufferings, was altogether unmoved and inexhaustible. But he could not be satisfied with the bare recital of the Saviour's excellence. Having touched on the subject, he must enlarge upon it, and not leave it till he has more fully declared the greatness of our obligations to him. Yet was this digression not by any means irrelevant to his purpose. It had a manifest bearing upon his main subject ; and was, in that view, capable of the richest improvement.

In opening to you his words, I will,

I. Consider the work of redemption, as here set forth—

And, that we may enter the more fully into it, let us distinctly shew,

1. Who is the person here spoken of—

[He was a *man* : for what he did, he did “in his own body.” But was he a mere man? No : he was God as well

as man, even “Emmanuel, God with us^a.” He was “Jehovah’s Fellow^b;” “the Mighty God^c;” “God over all, blessed for evermore^d.” He it was, “who, being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^e.”]

2. What he did for us—

[He, “his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” What this imports, will be understood by referring to the rites by which it was shadowed forth. Under the law, sacrifices were offered. The victims were beasts: to them were transferred, by the imposition of hands, the sins of the offender: in the offender’s stead they died; their flesh was consumed upon the altar: and, through the sacrifice thus offered, the sins of the offerer were forgiven.

But Jesus, who came down from heaven to redeem us, had no other offering to make but his own body: on him, therefore, our sins were laid: and the cross was, as it were, the altar on which he was placed; and the fire of God’s wrath, the flame with which he was consumed.

Stupendous mystery! But “it is a true saying, and worthy of all acceptation.”]

3. For what end he did it—

[Doubtless he did it, in the first place, to effect our reconciliation with God; as St. Peter says, in the very next chapter, “He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God^f.” But he had also a further end in view; namely, to destroy in us the power of sin; and to restore us to that life of righteousness which is indispensable to our happiness, either in this world, or in the world to come. In truth, if this were not effected, it would be to little purpose that an atonement had been made for sin: for as long as sin retained its dominion over us, we must of necessity have a very hell within us: nor would heaven itself be any source of blessedness to us, for want of a disposition suited to it, and a capacity to enjoy it.]

4. What is already the issue of it to every believing soul—

[“By his stripes” every believing soul “is healed.” The whole elect world was *virtually* healed in him, as soon as ever his sacrifice was offered; even as a debtor is absolved, the very moment that his debt is discharged; or a captive is liberated,

^a Matt. i. 23.

^b Zech. xiii. 7.

^c Isai. ix. 6.

^d Rom. ix. 5.

^e Phil. ii. 6—8.

^f 1 Pet. iii. 18.

the very instant that the redemption price is paid for him. But *really*, and *in fact*, our souls are healed, the very instant we believe in Christ: "our sins are blotted out as a morning cloud," and are "put away from us as far as the east is from the west;" "nor shall they be remembered against us any more for ever^g." A principle of grace, too, is infused into the soul, just as the cruse of salt was into the fountain by Elisha the prophet^h; and by it are its deadly qualities corrected; so that whatsoever proceeds from it in future is, comparatively at least, salubrious: the Holy Spirit in him is "a well of water, springing up unto everlasting lifeⁱ."]

That we may not lose sight of the objects for which this mystery is here adduced, we shall,

II. Improve it in the precise view in which the Apostle intended it to be applied—

We must bear in mind, that he is speaking to servants, and exhorting them to take patiently whatever injuries they may be called to sustain for righteousness' sake. For their direction and encouragement, he proposes to them the example of our Lord Jesus Christ: and, not content with specifying his conduct under the most cruel injuries, he suggests the ulterior ends of his sufferings, and the benefits which we derive from them; intending thereby to fix our attention on that mysterious subject,

1. As a balm for all our wounds—

[Be it so; we are suffering wrongfully, and because we endeavour to maintain a good conscience towards God. But what are our sufferings, when compared with those which our blessed Lord endured for us? Hear the revilings that were cast on him: "Say we not well, that thou hast a devil, and art mad^k?" Behold the sufferings inflicted on him! Go into the hall of Pilate; and there see the thorns driven into his temples, and his sacred body torn with scourges, "the ploughers ploughing on his back, and making long their furrows^l!" Behold his meekness and resignation; and will not you be ashamed to complain? Will you not rather take up your cross with cheerfulness; and "rejoice that you are counted worthy to partake of his sufferings, and be conformed

^g Heb. viii. 12. ^h 2 Kings ii. 19—22. ⁱ John iv. 14.

^k John vii. 20. viii. 48. and x. 20. Nothing less than this would sufficiently express their contempt for him.

^l Ps. cxxix. 3.

to him^m?" If he submitted to "stripes, that you might be healed," will not you welcome them, if by any means "he may be glorifiedⁿ?" Surely, if you reflect aright on this subject, you will regard the sacrifice even of life itself as a small matter, or rather as a ground for self-congratulation^o, and for thankfulness to God, who has conferred upon you that high honour for Jesus's sake^p.]

2. As an incentive to every duty—

[What shall "constrain you^q," if this do not? or what other motive can you wish for, than that which this stupendous mystery affords? Will you hesitate to forego any thing for Him who gave up all the glory of heaven for you? or to endure any thing for Him, who endured the penalties of God's broken law, and "became a curse for you?" Methinks, the more arduous the duty is, the more eager you will be to perform it; and the more self-denying your labours be, the more will you account yourselves honoured in being called to sustain them. Nothing will be any obstacle to you, if only his will may be done by you, and his glory be advanced^r.]

3. As a pattern of every grace—

[In all that Jesus did, he intended "to set you an example, that you should follow his steps." Mark his steps, then, from the cradle to the grave. Mark him, especially under those peculiar circumstances referred to in my text. See how he held fast his integrity, amidst the fiercest opposition. Do ye the same: nor let all that either men or devils can effect, ever divert you from "well-doing;" or cause you to violate, in the slightest degree, the dictates of your "conscience before God." Mark what returns he made to his persecutors: never, for a moment, did he render evil for evil; or cease to seek, to the uttermost, the welfare of his very murderers, praying to his "Father to forgive them." Let this be your invariable line of conduct also; "blessing them who curse you, and praying for those who despitefully use you, and persecute you^s." There is no grace which you may not see exercised by him, during his last hours, in the highest possible perfection. Set him then before you, under all those circumstances; and endeavour to "walk in all things as he walked:" so will you have an evidence that you are his, and that your hope in him is well founded; seeing that "you have the same mind that was in him," and "purify yourselves even as he was pure^t."]

^m 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iv. 14.

^o Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^p Phil. i. 29.

^q 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^r Acts xx. 24.

^s Matt. v. 44.

^t 1 John iii. 3.

MMCCCXCIX.

THE NATURE OF TRUE CONVERSION STATED.

1 Pet. ii. 25. *Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*

NOTHING so reconciles the Christian to sufferings, or so quickens him to exertions, as a recollection of the mercies he has experienced at the Lord's hands. The Apostle is speaking here to servants, who were likely to meet with cruel and oppressive usage from their masters on account of their holy profession. To encourage them to a meek submission to their trials, he reminds them of the example which the Lord Jesus Christ had set them, when, for the redemption of their souls, he had endured all the agonies of crucifixion; and of the exceedingly rich mercy which they had experienced, in having been brought to the knowledge of Christ, and to the enjoyment of his salvation. "They were healed:" they were healed "through the stripes inflicted on their Divine Master;" who was now "the Shepherd and Overseer," as he had been the Redeemer and Saviour, of their souls. Enjoying then such benefits through the superabounding grace of Christ, they ought willingly and cheerfully to endure for him whatever, in his providence, he might permit to be inflicted on them.

This appears to be the scope of the passage before us: in discoursing upon which, I shall have occasion to consider,

I. Our state by nature—

All of us in our unconverted state have been "as sheep going astray." The Prophet Isaiah, whose words the Apostle cites, declares this to have been the condition of all without exception: "*All we like sheep have gone astray^a.*" *In respect of folly*, we have resembled the silly sheep; which wanders it

^a Isai. liii. 6.

knows not whither, and exposes itself to dangers, from which, by continuing in the fold, it might have been exempt. *In respect of criminality*, our conduct justly subjects us to blame, from which the senseless animal is free: for our departure from God has been,

1. Wilful, without any just occasion—

[The mind of every unregenerate man is alienated from God: he hates his law: he is averse to his yoke: “he says to God, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” All indeed do not choose the same path; but, as the prophet says, they “go every one to his own way:” one in a way of open profaneness; another in a way of self-righteous formality: but in this all are agreed, that they listen not to the voice of the good Shepherd, nor walk in the footsteps of his flock — — —

And now, I would ask, What reason have they for this? “Has God been a wilderness to them? a land of darkness? Wherefore have they said, We are lords: we will come no more unto thee^b?” The true reason of our departure from him has been, that we have “not liked to retain him in our knowledge^c :” on the contrary, the notices which we have had of his power and grace “we have imprisoned in unrighteousness^d :” and actually “knowing that they who did such things were worthy of death, we have both done them, and had pleasure in those who did them,” choosing them as our friends and daily companions^e.]

2. Habitual, without one serious effort to return to him—

[The sheep in its wandering state betrays to all its disquietude; and if it knew which way to go, it would gladly return to the fold that it has left. But the unconverted man goes farther and farther from his God, without so much as a desire to return: or if a desire occasionally arise in his mind, it is so weak and so transient, as to produce no permanent effect. If a sense of guilt and danger obtrude itself upon him, he strives to silence the conviction, and to divert the thought from his mind. If urged to return to the fold of Christ, he replies, “No: I have loved strangers: and after them will I go^f.” This is their way, from the first moment that they begin to act^g: and in this they persist, till the good Shepherd, of his own grace and mercy, searches them out, and brings them back to his fold.]

^b Jer. ii. 31.

^c Rom. i. 28.

^d Rom. i. 18.

^e Rom. i. 32.

^f Jer. ii. 25.

^g Jer. xxii. 21.

Then takes place the change which is described in my text, and which leads me to set before you,

II. Our state by grace—

“ We return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls :” we return to the Lord Jesus Christ,

1. As our Owner—

[By grace we are taught, what in an unconverted state we little consider, that the Lord Jesus Christ is “ that good Shepherd who has laid down his life for his sheep^h.” This thought, coming with power to the soul, has a constraining influence : it fills us with wonder and admiration at the love of Christ ; and at the same time with grief, on account of our having forsaken such a Shepherd. Now we are perfectly amazed at our own ingratitude : and no terms are sufficiently strong whereby to express our self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Aware now that “ we have been bought with a price,” even with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, we are convinced that “ we are not our own,” but his ; and consequently, that we are bound to “ glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his.” Under this conviction we return to him, and give ourselves up to him as “ his purchased possession.”]

2. As our Provider—

[When once Divine grace has begun to operate effectually on our hearts, we see how we have been all our days feeding on the husks of swine, whilst we deserted the pastures in which it was our privilege to feed. But no longer can we be satisfied with such things — — — Now we affect that better food, which the Lord Jesus Christ has provided for us ; and desire to be led into those “ pastures, where he maketh his flock to lie down at noon.” Now we begin to understand what is meant by “ eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood ;” and we find “ his flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed ;” and the promises, which we once despised, are “ sweeter to us than honey or the honey-comb.”]

3. As our Protector—

[Now we tremble at the thought of the dangers to which we have been exposed : nor can we rest without imploring the protection of our good Shepherd, to deliver us from that roaring lion that seeketh to devour us. No longer can we venture ourselves at a distance from him : we feel that we are unable in ourselves to cope with the feeblest enemy : and we “ cast all our care on Him who careth for us.”]

^h John x. 15.

4. As our Governor—

[To hear the voice of our good Shepherd is now our delight. Wherever he calls, we follow. If we are erring in any thing, a word from him reclaims us. Wherever he calls, we go: whatever he forbids, we shun: whatever he commands, we do. The temptations which once allured us, have now in a great measure lost their power;—the terrors that alarmed us, their influence. What wilt *thou* have me to do? is now our one inquiry: and, having ascertained that, we are satisfied; nor can all the powers of earth and hell divert us from our purpose to obey his will.]

Such is the change which takes place in conversion. We say not that it is perfected in the first moment; nor that it is ever so perfect, but that it admits of increase. *In respect of parts*, a babe is perfect as a man; though every part admits of growth. So it is in the new man. All these things are found in him, though imperfect *as to their degree*. Contemplate then this change,

1. For the satisfying of your own minds—

[We cannot conceive of any figure better calculated to illustrate the conversion of a soul, than this. The state of a wandering sheep is known to all: the poor rustic that attends the sheep has as perfect an idea of its wants and dangers, as the most enlightened philosopher can have; and can apprehend as well the comparative felicity of those who are within the fold, watched over, and provided for, by a tender and faithful shepherd. Nor is there any difficulty in transferring these ideas to the state of a soul before, and after, its conversion. Consider then whether you are conscious of having experienced such a change? I will admit indeed that there are some who are sanctified, as it were, from the womb, and whose transition from a natural to a spiritual state is not so distinctly marked. But these are very few: and in them the image of a sheep obedient to its shepherd's voice, is as just, as in any other person whatever. The great mass of mankind have been far off from God; and they, when converted, are brought nigh unto him, as their owner, their provider, their protector, their governor, under all which characters they look unto him, and devote themselves to him, and expect every thing from him. I pray you, brethren, see whether it be thus with you: for, if you are Christians indeed, "you were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."]

2. For the inflaming of your gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[If you have been brought home to the fold of Christ, need I ask, whence this change arose? You will know full well that it did not originate with you, nor was carried into effect by any power of your own. The silly sheep would as soon return by its own wisdom to the fold it has deserted, as you would accomplish such a change in yourselves. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who sought you out, and apprehended you, and brought you home on his shoulders rejoicing: and if he had not effected it all for you and in you, you would have been roving from him to your latest hour, and would have perished in your sins. Be thankful to him then: adore him for the grace that has so distinguished you. And, whilst you give him glory for having so made you to differ from others and from your former selves, let his mercy constrain you to surrender up yourselves to him wholly, and without reserve.]

3. To excite your compassion towards a perishing world—

[Were you to see a straying sheep beset with dogs who were tearing it to pieces, who amongst you would not compassionate its wretched condition? Yet is this but a very faint image of the world around you; and not of the heathen world only, but of Christians also. We see not indeed the fate prepared for them: we see not how they are already, as it were, in the jaws of the roaring lion, whose prey they will be to all eternity. But this is not the less true, because we do not see it. It is their real state; and soon shall we see it with our bodily eyes. Our blessed Lord, “when he saw the multitudes around him,” (of persons nominally the Lord’s people,) “he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd.” Do ye then consider the deplorable condition of all around you, and use all possible means to bring them to the fold of Christ — — — And know for your comfort, that “he who shall convert a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.”]

MMCCCC.

GOD'S DISPOSITION TOWARDS THE RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED.

1 Pet. iii. 12. *The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers : but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

THERE is an error which obtains, to a considerable extent, amongst religious people, and which meets with too much encouragement also in the preaching of pious ministers ; namely, an idea that to insist on moral duties is *legal*. Suppose a servant of Christ were to address his audience in the words of David ; “Come, ye children, hearken unto me : I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good ? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good ; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous ; and his ears are open to their cry : but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil^a.” I say, suppose a minister of the Gospel were to address his people thus, he would be thought by many to be bringing them back to the law, and to be instructing them in a way contrary to the whole tenour of the Gospel. But this is a great mistake. Legality consists in *principle only*, and not in practice. If we teach men to do good works in order to obtain justification by them, *that* is legality ; and *that* subverts the Gospel : but if, whilst we make Christ the only foundation of a sinner's hope, we inculcate moral duties, we do nothing more than what Christian fidelity requires, and nothing but what the Apostles themselves continually did. It is remarkable that St. Peter, addressing the whole Christian Church, cites the entire passage which I have read to you from the Psalms, and applies it precisely as David himself did^b. In fact, we all need to be reminded, that “God will put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not ;” and that,

^a Ps. xxxiv. 11—16.

^b ver. 10—12.

whilst "his eyes are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers, his face is, and ever will be, against them that do evil."

In confirmation of this sentiment, I will shew,

I. God's tender regard for "the righteous"—

Here we must first state who "the righteous" are—

[We are not to understand this as relating to persons who are *perfectly* righteous, since there is no such a character to be found on earth. "There is not one that liveth and sinneth not:" "in many things we all offend." The term comprehends those who, in the prevailing habit of their lives, turn from iniquity to serve the living God. He, therefore, who has fled to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge, and, through the operation of the Spirit of God, is endeavouring to fulfil the will of God, may justly consider himself as answering to this character, notwithstanding many infirmities yet cleave unto him — — —]

Over all such persons the eyes of the Lord are fixed—

[God "beholdeth all, as well the evil as the good." But on the righteous his eyes are fixed, with peculiar complacency. He delights to look upon them: "His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth," to shew himself strong in their behalf; to protect them from every evil — — — and to supply them with every needful good — — —]

His ears, too, are open to their prayers—

[We all know with what a different feeling a parent beholds the children of strangers and his own. If his own child be in a situation of danger, his eye is upon it, to interpose in the time of need; and, if he were to hear its cry, all the tenderest feelings of his soul would be called forth, and all the efforts which he could make would be exerted for its relief. The inarticulate cry of an infant does not fall unheeded on a mother's ear. So God hears, not the prayer only, but the sighs and groans of his people; and will fulfil the unexpressed desires of their hearts — — — "Even before they cry, he will answer; and whilst they are yet speaking, he will hear."]

Such, however, are not his feelings towards all: for, in perfect contrast with this, is,

II. His indignation against the wicked—

"Those that do evil" must also be here defined—

[We do not comprehend under this character those who have yet some remaining infirmities; for this were to confound, in one indiscriminate mass, the righteous and the wicked: it is the workers of iniquity who are here spoken of; even those who, in the general tenour of their lives, are acting contrary to God's mind and will — — —]

Against these God sets his face—

[It is impossible but that he should view them with displeasure. He cannot forget what he has done for them, in sending his own Son to be the propitiation for their sins, and in striving with them by his Spirit to bring them to repentance: and when he sees how they requite these mercies, by holding fast their iniquities, by treading under foot his dear Son, and doing despite to his Spirit, he must of necessity be incensed against them. Accordingly, we are told that “he is angry with them every day^e,” that “he sets his face upon them for evil, and not for good^d,” and that he determines to execute upon them his wrathful indignation^e. They, perhaps, are full of confidence in their own minds, and are saying, “I shall have peace, though I go on adding sin to sin.” But this only ensures the evils which they will not deprecate: for God says, “The Lord will not spare that man; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against him; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him; and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven^f.” Instead of hearing his prayers, God further says concerning him, “I will deal in fury with him: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: though he cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear him^g.” Unhappy man! whoever thou art, that livest in wilful sin! this is thy lot; and this, if thou die in sin, will be thy portion to all eternity.]

OBSERVE, from hence,

1. Of how little signification are the opinions of men—

[If thou art righteous, perhaps the world will condemn thee as an enthusiast: and if thou art countenancing them in their evil ways, they will perhaps applaud thee as rational and wise. But to what purpose do men condemn, if God approve; or approve, if God condemn? If God's eye be upon us for good, we need not fear either men or devils: but if God set his face against us, though the whole universe were confederate to protect us, they could afford no help: “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.”]

^e Ps. vii. 11.

^d Amos. ix. 4.

^e Deut. xxxii. 40—42.

^f Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^g Ezek. viii. 18.

2. How desirable it is to obtain the approbation of our God—

[If there were no future world, the sense which the righteous have of God's favour were an ample recompence for all their services. But we must take eternity into our account. We must follow the righteous and the wicked into the presence of their God: we must there see what his favour imports, and what his displeasure: we must there behold the objects of his complacency seated on thrones of glory, and the monuments of his indignation cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. We must then contemplate their states as fixed to all eternity; so that, after millions of ages, the one will have no mitigation of his punishment, and the other no diminution of his bliss. Reflect on this, my brethren, and I shall not need to urge you to serve your God: your own feelings will urge you sufficiently: without any further loss of time, you will flee from the wrath to come, and, with all possible earnestness, lay hold on eternal life.]

MMCCCCI.

THE PERSECUTED ENCOURAGED.

1 Pet. iii. 13—15. *And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.*

EVERY kind of argument is urged in the Holy Scriptures to animate and encourage the followers of Christ. Sometimes the present benefit, arising from piety, is proposed as an inducement to walk in the paths of holiness: "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it^a." Sometimes a holy life and conversation is recommended, by a consideration of the regard which God himself will pay to it, and the approbation of it which he will be sure to express: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against

^a ver. 10, 11.

them that do evil." In my text, the approbation of men also is held forth, as in some respects a recompence to be hoped for: "For who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" But, aware that this argument would not always prove valid, the Apostle turns his address to a consolatory strain; and encourages the Lord's people with the thought, that if they should not meet with approbation from men, they might yet assure themselves of abundant support and comfort from their God.

Now, in these words, I wish you to notice,

I. The point conceded—

Humanly speaking, it should seem impossible that any should "suffer for righteousness' sake"—

[If we be "followers of that which is good," and maintain a holy consistency in our conduct, we must, one would think, meet with universal approbation. For we give to no one any occasion for offence: and when we meet with unkindness from others, we render nothing but good in return for it. If perverse and prejudiced people will speak evil of us, "our good conversation will put them to silence" and "to shame^b." Hence wives are encouraged to hope, that if, unfortunately, they are connected with unbelieving husbands, they may "by their good conversation win" those who would not be won by any thing else^c. At all events, after a season this may be expected, if not at first; since God has said, that "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him^d." Hence the question in my text is reasonable, and, one would think, unanswerable.]

Experience, however, proves that sufferings for righteousness' sake cannot altogether be avoided—

[This is conceded in my text; and in other parts of this epistle is plainly intimated: "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God: for *even hereunto were ye called*^e." Now, here it is intimated, not that we may suffer *though* we do well, and maintain a good conscience toward God, but *because* we do so: our very piety may

^b 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15. and iii. 16.

^d Prov. xvi. 7.

^c ver. 1.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 19—21.

be the ground on which the sufferings are inflicted. This shews that there is more connexion between the different beatitudes in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount than we should be ready to imagine. Our Lord, after saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, and they that mourn, and the meek, and they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the merciful, and the pure, and the peace-makers," adds, "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake^f." But what connexion can there be between persecution and the characters before portrayed? Can *they* be persecuted? Are there any people in the world so blind, yea, so abandoned, as to "revile *them*, and persecute *them*, and say all manner of evil falsely against *them*," and that too "for Christ's sake," and because of his image that is thus enstamped upon them? Yes; this piety is the very thing which will provoke the world's enmity, and call it forth in every act of hostility that can be conceived. For thus has our Lord forewarned us: "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^g." David found it so in his day: "They that render evil for good are against me, *because I follow the thing that good is*^h." And we also shall find the same: for it is said, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecutionⁱ." Indeed, if our blessed Lord himself could not escape, notwithstanding the inconceivable wisdom of his discourses, and the immaculate purity of his whole conduct, how shall *we*, who are so frail and fallible, hope to pass without much inveterate opposition? "If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household^k." Hence we are told not to be surprised at persecution, when it comes: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as a busy-body in other men's matters: yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf^l."]

This point being conceded, let us proceed to consider,

II. The consolation administered—

Persecution for righteousness' sake is by no means so great an evil as people are apt to imagine.

1. It is no proper ground for sorrow—

^f Matt. v. 3—11.

^h Ps. xxxviii. 20.

^k Matt. x. 25.

^g John xv. 18, 19.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^l 1 Pet. iv. 12, 15, 16.

[Would any one wish for a testimony from God, that he is in the right way, and that God is well-pleased with him? Behold, *that* is the very satisfaction which such evil treatment is intended to convey: "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you; delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons; being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake: and it shall turn to you for a testimony^m." But it is, in fact, a participation of Christ's sufferings, and a source of great glory to God. And is *that* a ground of *sorrow*? No; but rather of exalted *joy*; as the Apostle tells us: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. On their part, he is evil'spoken of; but on your part, he is glorifiedⁿ." In truth, it is a signal honour conferred upon us: and, instead of repining at it, we ought to "rejoice that we are counted worthy" to sustain it^o. But to speak of it thus, is, in reality, to come very far short of the statement which should be given: for, if the truth be spoken, it is a most invaluable gift: "Unto you it is *given*, in *the behalf of Christ*, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake^p." Yes, it is conferred as *God's choicest gift, in answer to the prayers of his only dear Son*. In bestowing upon us pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory, *God gives to us*: but when we are permitted to suffer for righteousness's sake, *we give to God*: we give our reputation, our property, our body, our life, to be disposed of according to his will, and for the glory of his name. And surely this is an honour in which we ought to rejoice with most unfeigned and exalted joy^q.]

2. It is no just occasion for fear—

[I will grant, that there is a confederacy of the whole world against us: (that is the case supposed by the prophet, whose words are cited in my text^r;) What can they do? They cannot touch so much as a hair of our head, without the special permission of our God^s: nor can they do any one thing which shall not be overruled for our eternal good^t. Hear the representation which holy David gives us of this matter: "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him^u." And if the Lord "laugh," shall we *cry*? God designs both to prepare us for glory, and to increase to us the measure of our happiness to all eternity: and for these ends he permits

^m Luke xxi. 12, 13.

^p Phil. i. 29.

^s Matt. x. 29, 30.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14.

^q Matt. v. 12.

^t Rom. viii. 28.

^o Acts v. 41.

^r Isai. viii. 12, 13.

^u Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13.

ungodly men to put us into a furnace, that he may “purify us from our dross;” and he makes “our light and momentary affliction to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^x.” Now, who that knew the designs of Heaven in relation to us, would dread the process by which such ends were to be accomplished? God has said, that “the wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of it he will restrain.” As one, who, in a flood that threatens to destroy his mill, lets upon it so much water only as shall accomplish his own purposes, and turns off the remainder by another sluice; so will God effect his gracious purposes for his people’s good, by the very efforts which their enemies are making for their destruction. Knowing this, therefore, we should “not be afraid of their terror, nor be troubled” at any confederacies they may make against us.]

3. A due regard to God is an ample security to all his people—

[To “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts” is to conceive of him as *an all-wise Governor*, that orders every thing in heaven and earth; and as *an all-sufficient Protector*, who is “a wall of fire round about” his people, not only to protect them, but to devour their assailants^y; and, lastly, as *an all-gracious Rewarder*, who, “if we suffer with him, will cause us also to reign with him, that we may be glorified together^z.” In this view of him, our duty is precisely what St. Peter tells us: “Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator^a.” We have only to realize in our hearts the agency, the power, the love, the faithfulness, of the omnipresent God, and we shall be as composed in the conflict, and as confident of the victory, as if we were already in heaven. If God has said, “Fear not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^b;” it is not merely our privilege, but our duty, to reply with David, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid^c?”]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us be thankful for the peace we enjoy—

[There have been seasons in the Church when persecution has raged with great fury, and almost driven Christianity from the face of the earth. That it is not so now, is not owing to

^x 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^z 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. Rom. viii. 17.

^b Isai. xli. 10.

^y Zech. ii. 5.

^a 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^c Ps. xxvii. 1.

men's love of religion; but to the protection afforded by human laws, and to the prevalence of an idea, that toleration *in religion* is essential to *civil* liberty. It is however a great mercy to us to live in these days: and I call upon you to improve the opportunities afforded you. You can assemble together, none making you afraid: you can consecrate yourselves to the Lord, without any apprehension of being dragged for it to prison or to death. You must not however imagine, that "the offence of the cross has ceased," or that you will not in your domestic and social circles have any thing to suffer. You may still have to make considerable sacrifices: your parents and governors may still act an unkind and oppressive part towards you; and your friends may treat you with such contempt as is not easy to be borne. But, if you are not "called to resist unto blood," you have reason to be thankful: and, in this season of comparative peace, you must prepare to maintain, when called to it, a vigorous and active warfare. The roaring lion is as vigilant as ever to destroy; and you also must be vigilant, if you would defeat his efforts^d.]

2. Let us, when persecution shall arise, act worthy of our high and holy calling—

[The command of our blessed Lord is, that we should be ready to lay down our lives for his sake. And he has plainly told us, that "he who will save his life, shall lose it; and he only who will lose his life for his sake, shall save it unto life eternal^e." On no other terms can we be acknowledged as his disciples. Nor should we wish for any other terms than these. We should be ready to "rejoice in tribulation^f;" and to "glory in the cross^g" for our Lord's sake: yea, we should even "*take pleasure* in infirmities and distresses for his sake," in order that he may be glorified in us, and that "his strength may be perfected in our weakness^h." To all of you then I say, Prepare to approve yourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ." Whoever you are, you are to "fight the good fight of faithⁱ," and to stem the torrent against all the enemies of your salvation: and to you God says, as he did to the Prophet Ezekiel, "Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads; as an adamant, harder than flint, have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house^k." "Be faithful unto death, and then will God give unto you the crown of life^l."]

^d 1 Pet. v. 8.

^e Gal. vi. 14.

^k Ezek. iii. 8, 9.

^e Luke xvii. 33.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^l Rev. ii. 10.

^f Rom. v. 3.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

MMCCCCII.

THE CHRISTIAN READY TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS HOPE.

1 Pet. iii. 15. *Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

THE Christian's life must of necessity appear strange to those who know not the principles by which he is actuated. They see a friend or relative pause amidst the crowd of his associates, and retrace, in opposition to them, all the steps he has trodden throughout his whole life. Perhaps he was highly respected; and he now subjects himself to ridicule and contempt, from those who once held him in estimation. Perhaps he had fair prospects of advancement in the world, which now, by what are called his fanatical and over-righteous proceedings, he abandons. He once seemed happy in the enjoyment of all that the world could give him; and now he is turning his back upon it all, and following after phantoms of his own imagination. What can all this mean? Whence does it proceed? Is it the effect of a disturbed imagination? Is it from a desire after notoriety and distinction? or is it the fruit of deliberate hypocrisy? What has he seen, what has he found, that can account for such a change in his conduct?

Such questions will arise in the minds of many. Many indeed will not trouble themselves with making such inquiries. A shorter method with them is to revile and persecute, if by any means they may deter this supposed enthusiast from persisting in his folly: but others, who are more candid, will be glad of information, in order that they may be able to form some judgment about the proceedings which appear at first sight so unaccountable.

Now with respect to the former of these, the open persecutors, the Christian has nothing to do, but to commit his cause to God, and to go forward in humble dependence upon him: but with respect to the

latter, he should gladly rise to the occasion, and “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear.”

You will perceive that the principle by which the Christian is carried forward, is hope—“a hope that is within him.” What the Christian’s hope is, will form the first point for our inquiry. His duty in relation to it shall then, in the next place, be set before you.

I. What is the hope by which the Christian is carried forward?

Whatever may be thought of it,

It is *a glorious* hope—

[It has respect to all that the soul of man can need, and to all that God himself can bestow. Contemplate man as a sinner, redeemed from sin and death through the blood of God’s only dear Son, who at the same time has purchased for him all the glory and felicity of heaven: hope fixes upon all these things as promised to the penitent and believing soul. Pardon and acceptance with a reconciled God; fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and a constant communication of grace and peace out of his fulness; the preserving and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; victory over death and hell; and an everlasting possession of heaven as a rightful inheritance;—all is apprehended by the believing Christian as his true and proper portion: by hope, he surveys it all, anticipates it all, enjoys it all. How wonderful! how surpassing all conception! Yet “to a lively hope of all these things is every child of God begotten^a.”]

It is *a well-founded* hope—

[It may well be asked, What warrant has the Christian to indulge such a hope as this? Is it a mere conceit of his own, an expectation unauthorized and presumptuous? No: it is a hope founded upon the promise and oath of the immutable Jehovah. God has revealed a way of salvation, through the blood and righteousness of his only-begotten Son; and has promised to accept to mercy all who shall come to him in the name of Christ. To all such, without exception, he has engaged to give all the blessings both of grace and glory. And in resting on his engagements, the believer cannot be deceived: for “God cannot lie,”—“cannot deny himself.”

^a 1 Pet. i. 3.

The Christian has a further ground of hope, in his own actual experience of these things: for in coming to God through Christ, he has found peace to his soul: he has received grace, whereby he is enabled to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: and "through the hope that is in him he does actually purify himself, even as Christ is pure^b."

Here then he stands as upon a rock, that defies the assaults whether of men or devils.]

It is a hope *that raises him up above all the things of time and sense*—

[In the prospect of all the blessings that are promised to him, how empty and insignificant do all earthly things appear! They are regarded by him as the dust upon the balance, yea, as lighter than vanity itself. However important the concerns of this world may seem, they are but for a moment: whereas the objects of the Christian's hope are everlasting. Nor are the sufferings of this present world, how formidable soever in themselves, regarded by him as worthy of any consideration, in comparison of the glory which he sees revealed before his eyes, and which he expects shortly to inherit^c. Here is the great secret of all his movements. Even in this life a man will endure much labour and self-denial, in order to obtain some great advantage: what then will not a man both do and suffer, who has all the glory of heaven in view, and an assured prospect of attaining it, if only he "hold on his way," and "be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel?"]

Such being the Christian's hope, let us inquire,

II. What is his duty in relation to it?

The principle which operates so forcibly on the Christian's mind cannot be fully appreciated by one who is a stranger to it in his own soul: yet may it, by a judicious statement, be brought so far within the view of an unenlightened mind, as to carry conviction with it to the heart and conscience: and every one who professes it should be ready to afford to an inquirer all possible satisfaction respecting it: he should "be ready to give to every one a reason of the hope that is in him:"

1. With frankness and fidelity—

[It is here supposed that an inquiry is made respecting it: for otherwise it is by no means expedient that a Christian be bringing forward his own personal experience, and making

^b 1 John iii. 3.

^c Rom. viii. 18.

that the subject of conversation. To do this is hateful. St. Paul, when forced by the accusations of his enemies to vindicate himself, and to declare the experience of his soul, again and again, with indignation, as it were, against himself, says, "I speak as a fool." And, where it is done without necessity, it is as strong a proof of a vain and weak mind as can well be conceived. But where a man asks us a reason of the hope that is in us, we should readily and cheerfully give him an answer. We should not be ashamed of our principles. We should never doubt whether they will bear us out, provided they be perspicuously and justly stated. We should candidly state, That we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation: that God has sent his only-begotten Son to die for us: that through his precious blood we hope and believe that we have obtained the forgiveness of all our sins. We should then state our conviction, that sinners redeemed with so inestimable a price are bound to consecrate themselves to him, and, above all things, to seek the glory of his great name. We should further avow our full persuasion, that in the day of judgment we shall all be dealt with according to our works; that those who have suffered any thing to stand in competition with their duty to Christ, will assuredly be cast out as wicked and unprofitable servants; but that they who have loved, and served, and honoured him with their whole hearts, shall be applauded by him as good and faithful servants, and enter for ever into the joy of their Lord. We may then appeal to the most prejudiced mind, and ask, Whether, with such views and principles, it be not our bounden duty to act as we do?

This kind of statement should be made "*readily*," to *all without exception* who desire to hear it, and are ready to attend to it. Whether they be more or less candid in their inquiries, we should account it a valuable opportunity to set before them the leading truths of Christianity; and we should avail ourselves of it, with a view at least to silence their objections, and, if it may please God, to convert and save their souls.]

2. With meekness and fear—

[There is, not unfrequently, found amongst the professors of religion a very unhallowed boldness and forwardness in declaring their sentiments. This is extremely indecorous, and odious in the eyes both of God and man. Though, as far as respects the truth itself, we should have no hesitation in declaring it, yet we should be much on our guard against any thing harsh or acrimonious in our manner of declaring it. Suavity and kindness become us on all occasions, and especially when speaking on the things of God. We must speak the truth indeed, whether it be palatable or not: but we must

“speak the truth in love,” and “instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth that so they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been taken captive at his will^d.” A Christian on such occasions must bear in mind how much the honour of God is involved in his conduct; and how much, humanly speaking, the salvation of others may depend on him. By an indiscreet mode of vindicating the truth, he may shut the ears, and harden the hearts of many; and so embitter their minds, as to make them determined haters and despisers of vital godliness: but by a meek, modest, affectionate, and prudent statement, he may remove their prejudices, and lead them to a candid examination of their own state before God. Hence then he should speak “with fear,” even as the Apostle Paul himself did at Corinth, where, as he himself tells us, “he was among them in weakness and fear and much trembling^e.” By thus combining meekness with fidelity, and fear with zeal, he may hope that he shall be the means of silencing opposers, and of winning many who would never have attended to the written or preached word^f.]

I would yet further enforce the exhortation in our text, with such ADVICE as naturally arises out of it—

Let it be the daily labour of your lives to be such as our text requires:

1. Be intelligent Christians—

[You ought to be able to “give to every inquirer a reason of the hope that is in you.” It is a disgrace to a Christian not to possess such a measure of divine knowledge, as shall qualify him for this. It is not necessary that every Christian should be a disputant, and be able to enter into theological controversies: but every man should be able to answer this question, “Why are you a Christian?” Alas! the generality of Christians, so called, can assign no better reason for being Christians, than a Turk can for being a Mahometan. But to all such I must say, You have yet to learn what a scriptural hope is; and have only “the hope of an hypocrite, which will be swept away like a spider’s web.” I beseech you all then to study the Scriptures with all diligence; and to pray unto God, that you may by them be made wise unto everlasting salvation.]

2. Be steadfast Christians—

^d 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 3.

^f 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

[You must expect that your faith and patience will be tried: but you must not give way to fear, or be diverted from your duty by any consideration whatever. There should be in you such a hope, as, like an anchor of the soul, shall keep you steadfast amidst all the storms and tempests with which you may be assailed^g. By means of this divine principle you should be realizing all the glories of the eternal world; in the view of which, all earthly glories will sink into insignificance, and all earthly trials appear "light and momentary"^h." Survey then the inheritance to which you are begotten: take Pisgah views of the promised land: and then you shall be enabled to say respecting every thing that may occur, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy."]

3. Be humble Christians—

[Humility is the root and summit of Christian perfection. If men see you offended and irritated by the unkind usage which you experience, they will say, "Wherein are their principles superior to ours; or their conduct better than ours? They pretend to possess a hope that lifts up their souls in an extraordinary degree: but wherein does it shew itself? and what do they more than others? It is no uncommon thing for persons professing godliness to feel towards their revilers and persecutors the very same contempt and hatred which their persecutors manifest towards them. But this is a proof, that, whatever they may *profess* of love to Christ, they have never attained "the mind that was in Christ." If you would be Christians indeed, you must resemble Him "who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and was dumb before his persecutors, even as a sheep before its shearers is dumb," and who in the very agonies of crucifixion prayed for his murderers. So must you: you must "shew all meekness towards all men," and be more fearful of dishonouring God, or of casting a stumbling-block before your enemies, by any thing hasty or ill-advised, than of suffering all that the most bitter persecutors can inflict upon you. Thus "letting patience have its perfect work, you will be perfect and entire, wanting nothingⁱ."]

^g Heb. vi. 19.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

ⁱ Jam. i. 4.

MMCCCCIII.

THE NATURE AND ENDS OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

1 Pet. iii. 18. *Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*

“SUFFERINGS, of whatever kind, are not in themselves joyous, but grievous:” nevertheless they may on some occasions become a source of joy and triumph. If, for instance, they be inflicted for righteousness' sake, and we have the testimony of our conscience that we suffer for well-doing, we may then unfeignedly rejoice in them, as on other accounts, so especially because they render us conformable to our Lord and Saviour. This thought was suggested by St. Peter as a rich source of consolation to the persecuted Christians of his day: nor can *we* have any stronger incentive to patience and diligence in every part of our duty, than the consideration of what Christ has done and suffered for our sake.

The words before us lead us to contemplate,

I. The nature of Christ's sufferings—

We speak not of their *quality*, as corporeal, or spiritual, but of their nature as described in the text. They were,

1. Penal—

[Some affirm that the sufferings of Christ were only to confirm his doctrine, and to set us an example: but these ends might have been equally answered by the sufferings of his Apostles^a. But they were the punishment of sin: and the wrath of God due to sin, was the bitterest ingredient in them. We had merited the curse and condemnation of the law: and he, to deliver us from it, “*became a curse for us*”^b. “He

^a If there was nothing penal in our Lord's sufferings, his example was not near so bright as that of many of his disciples; since he neither met his sufferings with so much fortitude, nor endured them with such triumphant exultation, as many of his followers have since done. But if they were the penalty due to sin, his *apparent* inferiority is fully accounted for.

^b Gal. iii. 10, 13.

suffered *for sins*;" and though his punishment was not *precisely the same* either in quality or duration, as ours would have been, yet was it *equivalent* to our demerit, and satisfactory to the justice of an offended God.]

2. Vicarious—

[It was not for any sin of his own that Jesus was cut off^c: he was "a Lamb without spot or blemish^d," as even his enemies, after the strictest scrutiny, were forced to confess^e. He died, "the just *for*, and in the room of, the unjust^f:" the iniquities of all the human race were laid upon him^g: he was wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities, and the chastisement he endured was to effect *our* peace^h. He, who was innocent, became a sin-offering for us, that we, who are guilty, might be made righteous in himⁱ.]

3. Propitiatory—

[The death of Christ, like all the sacrifices under the Jewish law, was an atonement for sin. It is continually compared with the Jewish sacrifices in this view^k. We say not, that the Father hated us, and needed to have his wrath appeased by the interposition of his Son (for the very gift of Christ was the fruit of the Father's love^l); but we say, in concurrence with all the inspired writers, that when it was necessary for the honour of the Divine government that sin should be punished, either in the offender himself or in his surety, Christ became our surety, and by his own death made a true and proper atonement for our sins, and thus effected our reconciliation with God^m. On any other supposition than this, the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd, and the writings of the New Testament are altogether calculated to deceive us.]

From considering the nature of our Lord's sufferings, let us proceed to notice,

II. The end of them—

His one great design was to bring us to God :

1. To a state of acceptance with him—

[We were "enemies to God in our minds by wicked works;" nor could we by any means reconcile ourselves to God: we could *not by obedience*; because the law required perfect obedience: which, having once transgressed the law, we could never afterwards pay: *nor could we by suffering*, because the penalty denounced against sin was eternal, and

^c Dan. ix. 26. ^d 1 Pet. i. 19. ^e John xviii. 38. and xix. 6.

^f Ὑπὲρ, this imports substitution. See Rom. v. 7. in the Greek.

^g Isai. liii. 6. ^h Isai. liii. 4. ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 21.

^k Heb. passim. ^l 1 John iii. 16.

^m Eph. v. 2. and 1 John ii. 2.

consequently, if once endured by us, could never be remitted. But, when it was impossible for us to restore ourselves to God's favour, we were reconciled to him by Christ's obedience unto deathⁿ; and to effect this reconciliation was the very end for which he laid down his life^o.]

2. To the enjoyment of his presence in this world—

[The holy of holies was inaccessible to all except the high-priest; nor could even he enter into it except on the great day of annual expiation^p. But at the very instant of our Lord's death, while the Jews were worshipping in the temple, the veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the most holy place was opened to the view of all^q. This was intended to declare, that from henceforth all might have the freest and most intimate access to God^r. All are now made priests unto God^s; and, in this new and living way, may come to his mercy-seat to behold his glory, and to enjoy his love^t.]

3. To the possession of his glory in the world to come—

[It was not only to save us from condemnation, but to exalt us to everlasting happiness, that Jesus died. The salvation which he procured for us, is a "salvation with eternal glory^u." The robes in which the celestial spirits are arrayed, were washed in his blood^x; and all the ransomed hosts unite in ascribing to him the felicity they enjoy^y. Nothing short of this could answer the purposes of his love^z; and the accomplishment of this was the ultimate end of all he suffered^a.]

Before we conclude this subject, let us CONTEMPLATE—

1. How great is the love of Christ to our fallen race^b!

2. How cheerfully should we endure sufferings for his sake^c!

3. How inexcusable will they be who continue still at a distance from their God^d!

ⁿ Col. i. 21, 22. Rom. v. 10.

^o Eph. ii. 16.

^p Heb. ix. 7, 8.

^q Matt. xxvii. 50, 51. ^r Eph. ii. 13, 18.

^s Rev. i. 6.

^t Heb. x. 19—22. and xii. 18—24.

^u 2 Tim. ii. 10.

^x Rev. vii. 14.

^y Rev. v. 9, 10, 12.

^z John xvii. 24.

^a Heb. ii. 9, 10.

^b Who would do any thing like this for a fellow-creature? Rom. v. 7, 8. Neither Moses, Exod. xxxii. 32; nor St. Paul, Rom. ix. 3. thought of any thing like this. See the Discourse on Rom. ix. 1—5.

^c Compare ver. 14. with the text, and Heb. xiii. 12, 13. and Acts v. 41.

^d John xv. 22. *à fortiori*, and Heb. ii. 3.

MMCCCCIV.

NOAH'S ARK A TYPE OF CHRIST.

I Pet. iii. 21. *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.*

GOD has marked the necessity of holiness no less by the dispensations of his providence than by the declarations of his grace. His destroying of the whole world for their iniquity, evinced as strongly as any thing could, that sin should never go unpunished, and that the righteous only should be saved. In this view St. Peter introduces the mention of that well-attested fact, and declares, that the salvation experienced by Noah in the ark, was typical of that which we experience by Christ, and into which we are brought by our baptism. The text is by no means free from difficulties: to render it as intelligible as we can, we shall consider,

I. The typical salvation here referred to—

God had determined to overwhelm the world with a deluge—

[Though there had been so few generations upon earth, that Noah's own father (Lamech) had been contemporary with Adam for sixty years, and lived till within five years of the flood, so that Noah, and the people of that generation, had, for no less than six hundred years together, received instruction only at second hand from Adam himself, yet had "all flesh corrupted their way," insomuch that "God repented that he had made man," and resolved to destroy him from off the face of the earth.]

But for the preservation of the righteous he instructed Noah to make an ark—

[This vessel was not constructed according to man's device, but by the special direction of God himself. To the eyes of man it doubtless seemed an absurd attempt: but "the foolishness of God is wiser than man;" and the event justified the hopes and expectations of Noah.]

In the mean time he called the people to repentance by the ministry of Noah—

[God exercised forbearance towards them one hundred and twenty years. But they "received his grace in vain." And the means used for their salvation only ripened them for destruction.]

When the appointed time was come, he ordered Noah and his family to go into the ark—

[The symptoms of the flood did not yet appear; but these favourites of heaven were to condemn the world, not in word only, but in deed. By manifesting their faith, their fear, and their obedience, they were practically to condemn the world's unbelief, security, and disobedience^a. And, upon their entrance into the ark, "God shut them in" with his own hand, that the door might be secure against the violence of the wind and waves.]

Then the waters, that destroyed all the world besides, bore up them in perfect safety—

[Every other refuge now proved vain. The unbelievers found to their cost the truth of God's threatenings. Their numbers did not screen them from his judgments. Nor was the fewness of the elect any bar to their acceptance and salvation. They rose, while others sank in the mighty waters. Nor, if any cleaved to the ark, did that avail them. The very builders of the ark perished. They, and they only, who were in the ark, were made the monuments of saving mercy.]

This history being altogether typical, we shall consider,

II. The correspondent salvation which we enjoy—

Baptism is spoken of in the text as the *antitype*^b, of which Noah's flood was the type. But we apprehend the Apostle's meaning to be, that Noah's salvation in the ark was typical of our salvation under the Christian dispensation^c. This subject will be best understood, not by drawing the parallel between the flood and baptism, or between the ark and Christ, but by exhibiting *the fact* of our salvation as corresponding with that of Noah.

^a Heb. xi. 7.

^b Ἀντίτυπον.

^c The relative *ὃ* cannot agree with *κιβωτοῦ*, which is feminine, but must agree with *ἕδαρος*, or rather perhaps with the whole sentence; this last construction renders the sense of the passage incomparably more clear; on which account it is here preferred.

God has determined to punish the world with an everlasting destruction—

[His word bears frequent and most undeniable testimony to this solemn truth^d — — —]

But he has prepared a Saviour for those who repent and turn unto him—

[Human sagacity never could have devised a way of saving sinners consistently with the honour of God's perfections. But God has sent and qualified his only-begotten Son, that, through him, all who believe might be justified from all things. And though salvation through the death of Christ be "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet to them that are called to partake of it, it has invariably proved the power of God and the wisdom of God^e.]

Ever since the method of salvation has been announced to the world, God has been inviting sinners to embrace it—

[The first plank of this ark was laid, if we may so speak, when God promised to Adam a "Seed, who should bruise the serpent's head." From that day, it has been erecting visibly in the world, in order that, while men were warned of their danger, they might see their remedy: and now, for nearly six thousand years, has God exercised forbearance towards an impenitent and unbelieving world.]

By "baptism" we embark, as it were, on board this divinely-constructed vessel—

[When we are baptized into the faith of Christ, we profess our persuasion that "there is salvation in no other," and our desire "to be found in him," not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith in him^f. Thus we come to be *in him*, as a branch in the vine, as a man-slayer in a city of refuge, as Noah in the ark. Not that this benefit is annexed to the mere outward form of baptism, but to that baptism which is accompanied with "the answer of a good conscience towards God^g."]

Being then *in Christ*, we are saved "by his resurrection^h"—

[It should seem, that Noah's enclosure in the ark for so long a period was a kind of sepulture; and his elevation on the

^d Matt. xxiv. 37—39. 2 Pet. ii. 5, 9. Ps. xi. 6. and ix. 17.

^e 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^f Acts iv. 12. Phil. iii. 9

^g See the words following the text.

^h ver. 21.

waters, till he afterwards came forth from the ark, was a kind of resurrection, when he took possession of a new world. Thus, according to St. Paul, "we are buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life: for if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrectionⁱ." This appears to be *intended* by St. Peter in the text, and to be, on the whole, the most natural, as well as most beautiful, construction of it: as Noah entered into the ark, and was saved by its elevation above the water-floods, so we, by baptism, enter into Christ, and are, by his resurrection, saved from sin and Satan, death and hell; yea, like Noah too, we are brought safely to the possession of a new and heavenly world^k.]

INFER—

1. How deeply should we reverence the ordinances of God!

[What is said of baptism is true, in a measure, of every other ordinance: yet how shamefully is both that, and every other ordinance, profaned amongst us! Let us remember, that all the institutions of God are intended to help forward our salvation: but, if trifled with, they will fearfully aggravate our condemnation.]

2. How careful should we be to obtain "the answer of a good conscience!"

[In the Apostles' days, as well as in ours, they, who applied for baptism, were *interrogated* with respect to their faith and practice; nor could the mere ablution of the body profit them, if they had not a correspondent purity of soul. Thus it is with us: we shall in vain receive the rite of baptism, or partake of the Lord's supper, if we cannot *declare, as in the presence of God*, that it is our desire and endeavour to be holy as God is holy. Let us then not lay an undue stress upon outward observances of any kind; but rather seek a conformity to the Divine image; for it will surely be found true at the last, that "the pure in heart shall see God," but that "*without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*"]

ⁱ Rom. vi. 4, 5.

^k If the opposition between *διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος* and *σωζει δι' ἀναστροφῆς* be marked, the sense of this difficult passage will be more apparent.

MMCCCV.

A WORLDLY LIFE TO BE RELINQUISHED.

1 Pet. iv. 3. *The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.*

THE end of all God's dispensations towards his people is to promote their advancement in righteousness and true holiness. The Lord Jesus Christ himself "was made perfect through sufferings;" and the afflictions which his people suffer, from whatsoever quarter they arise, are intended "for their profit, to make them partakers of God's holiness." The Lord's people are "ordained to suffer," in conformity to their Divine Master: and their great concern should be, not so much to get rid of their trials, as to make a due improvement of them, by "ceasing from sin," and living more entirely to God, and for God. To this purpose the Apostle speaks in the verses before my text; and then adds, that the time past might well suffice to have lived after the manner of the Gentile world, whose ways it became them henceforth determinately to renounce,

From the words before us I shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what respects we also have wrought the will of the Gentiles—

The unconverted man, whether Jew or Gentile, is cast into the same mould, and, in the main, walks in the same paths. The nominal Christian also has the same views, the same desires, the same pursuits. In some external matters he may differ from the heathen: but in the most essential parts of his conduct he accords with them. He resembles them,

1. In an utter disregard of God—

[The heathen, of course, cannot regard God, because they know him not, nor are at all acquainted with his will. The nominal Christian has in some little degree the knowledge of his will; but he regards it no more than if he were utterly

unacquainted with it. "He professes to know God; but in works he denies him."

On this subject let me appeal to yourselves. It is, I confess, a heavy charge, to say that you have hitherto "lived like heathens." But I would put it to your own consciences, and ask, *What regard have you shewn for God's authority?* and, *What desire have you manifested to obtain his favour?* You have had in your very hands the means of knowing his will: you profess to believe that the Scriptures have been given you by him, on purpose to instruct you in the knowledge of him. Have you been thankful for this revelation of his will? Have you studied it with care, for the express purpose of learning how you might please and serve him acceptably? Have you turned away from every thing which his word forbids? Have you followed after every thing which his word enjoins? Have you embraced the whole of it as an infallible record, believing all that it reveals, and expecting with hope and fear the accomplishment of all his promises and all his threats? Have you, in short, "trembled at his word," as it became you to do? I must further ask, Have you humbled yourselves before him for all your past transgressions? Have you fled for refuge to the hope set before you? Have you washed your souls daily in the blood of the Lamb, even in that fountain which was opened for sin and for uncleanness? Have you cried mightily to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit to sanctify you, and to transform you into the Divine image? Have you surrendered up your souls to God as living sacrifices, and accounted an entire dedication of yourselves to him your reasonable service? If you have not done this, wherein have you differed from the heathen; except indeed, that you have sinned against greater light and knowledge than they, and therefore involved yourselves in deeper guilt and heavier condemnation?]

2. In a determined prosecution of your own will—

[The character given of the Gentiles is, that "they lived to the lusts of men, and not to the will of God^a." And what have you done? By what standard have you regulated your conduct? and whose will have you consulted? A decent heathen regulates himself according to the standard which the society in which he lives has established. Whatever they approve, he follows: and whatever would degrade him in their estimation, he avoids. And has it not been thus with you also? In whatever line of life you move, have you not conformed to the habits of your associates, accounting every thing innocent which they deemed innocent; and satisfied with yourselves, if you only satisfied them? Amongst the particular habits of the

^a ver. 2.

Gentiles, the Apostle enumerates "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:" and do not these characterize the Christian world also? If we are free from open idolatry, we are guilty of it in our hearts as much as the heathen themselves: for whilst some "make a god of their belly," and others are addicted to "covetousness, which is idolatry," we all, in one way or other, "love and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is over all, blessed for ever." As to all the other evils, it will be well if we have not been guilty even in the outward act: for "lasciviousness and excess of wine" are not such uncommon evils amongst us; but, granting that we have been free as it respects *the act*, have we abhorred the very thought of such evils, as we ought? Have we not, on the contrary, found pleasure in "revellings and banquetings," and "SUCH LIKE," without ever thinking that "they who do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God^b?" Is it not a notorious fact, that this season of the year, which ought to be in a more especial manner consecrated to holy duties, is devoted to "revelling and banqueting;" precisely as if the Lord Jesus Christ had come unto the world, not to deliver us from sin, but to give us a licence to sin^c? But, whether we have indulged in these things or not, still the same charge must be reiterated against us; namely, that we have lived to ourselves, and not to God; and have made our own inclinations the rule of our conduct, instead of adhering to his commands. This is "the course of this world;" this is the line of conduct which characterizes without exception "the children of disobedience," and the vassals of the wicked one^d.

Say now, brethren, whether ye have not "wrought the will of the Gentiles;" or, in other words, whether ye have not lived like "atheists" and heathens^e?]

Let me then proceed to shew you,

II. That the time past may well suffice for such a course as that—

Let me put it to yourselves :

1. What benefit have you derived from this course hitherto ?

[Have you found that the gratifications you have enjoyed have afforded you any solid satisfaction? You "have sown

^b Compare the words following the text with Gal. v. 19—21.

^c It would be well if those who speak of a *merry Christmas*, would inquire what is meant by "*revellings, and such like*."

^d Eph. ii. 2, 3.

^e ἄθεοι ἐν κόσμῳ, Eph. ii. 12.

vanity; and what but vanity has been your recompence^f?" St. Paul puts the question to us; "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed^g?" Has not the creature proved, what God forewarned you it would prove, "a broken cistern, that could hold no water?" You are come, I will suppose, to a season of great trouble, or perhaps of sickness and approaching dissolution. Now what consolation have you from all that ever you enjoyed? Can the remembrance of it comfort you? Can it assuage your pains, or administer support under them? Can it pacify a guilty conscience, or take away the sting of death? Can it gild your last scenes, and brighten your prospects in the eternal world? Alas! alas! have you not "spent your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not^h?" I will even suppose that you have possessed all that Solomon himself possessed, and revelled like him in every species of indulgence: what do you now find it all to be, but "vanity and vexation of spirit?" Is it not "high time, then, that you awake" from your delusionsⁱ? After having so long "fed upon ashes, and been turned aside by a deceived heart," is it not high time that you at last see, that "you have had nothing but a lie in your right hand^k?"]

2. What benefit do you expect to derive from it hereafter?

[If you follow your sinful course ever so long, do you expect that it will be productive of any more happiness than it has already been? Will the creature change? or the condition of man change? Or will God so change the whole course of nature, that you shall find in earthly things what is to be found in him alone? But, if such changes are not to be expected, what will be the issue of such a course at the tribunal of your God? Had you been Gentiles, it might be expected, if I may so speak, that you had lived like Gentiles; or at all events, you would then "be judged by such a law as you yourselves had lived under^l." But you were Christians; and had the law of God in your hands; yea, and the Gospel of Christ too: and therefore you shall be judged by the law, and by the Gospel, which you have so neglected and despised. I would that Christians would place themselves as at the bar of judgment; and bethink themselves, what will be their view of their present courses *then*? Will a life of carnal ease and indulgence, together with a neglect of God and of our eternal interests, be found so venial *then*? To have professed ourselves Christians, and have lived like heathens, will *this*

^f Job xv. 31.

^g Rom. vi. 21.

^h Isai. lv. 2.

ⁱ Rom. xiii. 11.

^k Isai. xliv. 20.

^l Rom. ii. 14.

appear so light a matter, as it is judged now to be? No verily: things will then be seen in their true colours; and the care of the soul will then appear to be, what it really is, "*the one thing needful.*"]

APPLICATION—

[If now you are not convinced that the time past is sufficient for such a course, I beg leave to ask, what time you will think sufficient? I presume you will not say, that *the whole* life is to be spent in such a way: I conceive that no one is so blind, but that he will acknowledge that God ought to be served at some time or other; and that, at some time or other, the concerns of the soul ought to occupy the mind. Even those who die by the hands of the public executioner confess, that some preparation is desirable for them, before they enter into the presence of their God. What time then will you agree to be sufficient to work the will of the Gentiles; and when will you account it reasonable to begin to fulfil the will of God? Will you say, twenty years hence; or, forty years hence? Such a period as that may surely be acknowledged latitude enough, even for the youngest amongst us. But, if you will go to those who have served the world and their own lusts for twenty or forty years, you will not find them at all more ready to turn to God, than they were the first moment that they entered on that course. On the contrary, the longer they have lived in sin, the more rooted are their lusts, and the more inveterate their habits: their consciences, too, are the more seared and hardened; and the more averse are they to be instructed in the way of righteousness. Besides, are we sure that so many years shall be added to our lives; or that, if they be, we shall be at all more disposed to serve God then, than we are at present? Are we sure that the Spirit of God, to whom we "do despite," will not at last depart from us, and give us up to final impenitence?

Beloved brethren, be persuaded,—whatever be your age, be persuaded, I say,—that the time past is abundantly sufficient for the course which you have followed. And now, without any further delay, begin to "work the works of God." Do you ask, "What is the work of God?" I answer, as our blessed Lord did, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent^m." This is indeed the one great concern to which we should all attend. We are sinners, obnoxious to God's wrath and eternal condemnation. But Jesus Christ is a Saviour: he is sent into the world on purpose to seek and to save that which was lost. Do ye then go to him; believe in him; implore mercy through him; cast

^m John vi. 28, 29.

yourselves upon him; and “cleave to him with full purpose of heart.” Let the time which you have spent in the neglect of him be redeemed; and your efforts be the more urgent, in proportion to the time which you have lost. As for the baptized heathens with whom you have associated, “come out from among themⁿ,” and “no longer conform yourselves to their evil ways^o.” They will, as the Apostle tells you, “think it strange that you continue not to run with them to the same excess of riot as you formerly did; and will speak evil of you on account of it^p,” but be it so: if this be an occasion of grief to you, it should not be on your own account, but on theirs; for “they shall surely give an account to Him that is ready to judge both the quick and dead^q,” and “their hard ungodly speeches, which they have spoken against you” for his sake, will be visited upon them to their everlasting confusion^r. Mind you yourselves: seek the salvation of your own souls, whether others will attend to their souls or not. Do not ye perish in Sodom, because your relatives mock at your fear of God’s judgments^s: neither linger in the plain, lest the storms of God’s vengeance overtake you: but be in earnest: and “whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might^t.”]

ⁿ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^o Rom. xii. 2.

^p ver. 4.

^q ver. 5.

^r Jude, ver. 14, 15.

^s Gen. xix. 14.

^t Eccl. ix. 10.

MMCCCCVI.

NEARNESS TO DEATH A MOTIVE TO WATCHFULNESS.

1 Pet. iv. 7. *The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*

THE office of the Gospel is, not to fill the mind with notions, but to renew the heart, and sanctify the life. It is true indeed, that the smallest conformity to its precepts will cause us to be loaded with obloquy and derision by an ungodly world^a: but it furnishes us with very sufficient motives to disregard the censures of men, and to devote ourselves unreservedly to God^b. The nearness of death and judgment is of itself an irresistible argument for

^a ver. 4.

^b This seems to be the meaning of the verse before the text.

maintaining an indifference to earthly things, and for exerting ourselves to the uttermost to secure a happy eternity. Such is the scope of the Apostle's words; in commenting on which we shall notice,

I. The declaration—

[It is possible that St. Peter, in speaking of "the end of all things," might have some reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was fast approaching, and to the consequent annihilation of the Jewish polity. But it is more probable that he referred to the end of the world, which was generally represented as so near, that St. Paul was obliged to rectify the mistake which had arisen in the minds of the Thessalonians with respect to it^c. We may however justly consider it as relating to the hour of death, which is to every man "the end of all things" here below. Death terminates our *joys and honours*, how elevated soever they may be — — — It puts a period also to our *hopes and prospects*, be they ever so bright and well-founded — — — It incapacitates us also for carrying into effect all our *purposes and endeavours*. We may have seen the vanity of earthly things, and have formed a resolution to withdraw our affections from them, and to prosecute with care the things belonging to our everlasting peace: we may have actually begun to execute our purposes: we may have begun to pay more attention to divine ordinances; than we have done in past times, and to read some religious books, and to cultivate an acquaintance with some pious characters, in hopes of getting instruction from them, and of furthering thereby our eternal interests: but death will cut short all these good beginnings, and leave us cause to bewail to all eternity that we had deferred the concerns of our souls so long. The very instant death comes, there is no more room for repentance; no more shall the tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer sound in our ears; no more will the Holy Spirit strive with us to bring us to God; the time for repentance is past; the offers of salvation are closed; the day of grace is come to an end; and nothing remains for the soul but to weep and bewail its folly in hell for ever and ever — — —

This period is nigh "at hand" to every one of us. If our life were prolonged to the age of Methuselah, the space would be only as the twinkling of an eye in comparison of eternity^d: but it is contracted to a very narrow span; nor can we be sure that it shall continue even to the expiration of the present day: so justly may it be said in reference to all of us, "The end of all things is at hand."]

^c 2 Thess. ii. 2, 3.

^d 2 Pet. iii. 8.

The consideration of this solemn truth may well prepare us for,

II. The exhortation grounded upon it—

1. Be sober—

[Sobriety does not merely import temperance with relation to meat and drink, but moderation with regard to our desire of earthly things, or our enjoyment of them. Our minds are apt to be very strongly fixed on the things of time and sense; we are fascinated with the prospect of some pleasure, some honour, some emolument, for the attainment of which we labour day and night, and in the possession of which we are ready to say, "Soul, take thine ease." But should we do thus, if we considered how transient our enjoyment of them will be? Should we not rather sit loose to the things of this world, seeking them as though we sought them not, and using them as though we used them not^e? Let us then cultivate this spirit^f. We need not on this account relax our *diligence* in our earthly vocations; for diligence is our bounden duty^g, and will consist very well with the devoutest frame, and most ardent exertions in the Lord's service^h: but "the *affections* must be set on things above, and *not on things below*ⁱ."]]

2. Watch unto prayer—

[Prayer is indispensably necessary for the salvation of the soul. Without prayer, we can obtain nothing from God, no pardon of sin, no strength for obedience, no preparation for eternity. If we live without prayer, we shall die without hope. But it is no easy matter to persevere in prayer. We can complain to a fellow-creature with ease and fluency: but the moment we attempt to express our wants in prayer to God, our minds wander to the very ends of the earth, and our mouths are shut before him. Any trifling occurrence is sufficient to divert us from prayer: and we postpone this duty from time to time, under the idea of having some more favourable opportunity for the performance of it. But would it be thus with us, if we were duly impressed with the shortness and uncertainty of time? Even the most abandoned malefactors will weep and pray when their execution is drawing nigh: and should not *we*, if we felt that "the end of all things is at hand?" Let us then watch against every thing that may either divert us from prayer, or distract us in it: yea, let us watch that our prayers be such as our necessities require, and such as God will accept. Let them be offered up with constancy, with fervour, and with faith. And the nearer we

^e 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

^h Rom. xii. 11.

^f Phil. iv. 5.

ⁱ Col. iii. 2.

^g Eccl. ix. 10.

approach to our latter end, the more “abundant let us be in supplication and thanksgivings.”]

APPLICATION—

[*To the elder part of this assembly* one would think it should be needless to add any thing on this subject: for they who have already lived out half their days, must feel (one would imagine) that their “time is short.” But, alas! even the aged need to be reminded of this obvious truth, and to be stirred up to improve their few remaining hours. Yes, even they often become more worldly with their advancing years, and manifest as great a backwardness to spiritual duties as they did in the earlier part of their existence. If one of this character be present, may God impress upon his mind a sense of his guilt and folly, and awaken him from his slumbers, ere it be too late! — — —

To the younger part, who dream of months and years to come, it is more obviously necessary to repeat the warning in the text. You are apt to think and say, “It is time enough yet for me to seek after God.” But “have you made a covenant with death?” have you been assured that neither disease nor accident shall cut you off in the bloom of life? Look around you, and see how many of your own age are gone within your remembrance^k. And what if death had seized on you, instead of them; where had you been at this moment? I entreat you, if you have any regard for your own souls, consider this. Put the question to your conscience, and answer it faithfully in the sight of God: and then look at the direction given you by God himself: “Be sober,” and moderate in your attachment to the things of time; and “watch unto prayer,” that you “may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”

^k Here any recent deaths may be adverted to, and the circumstances of them, if peculiar, be specified.

MMCCCCVII.

THE DUTY AND OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

1 Pet. iv. 8. *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

THE divine authority of our religion is fully established. Its external evidences demonstrate God to be its author; nor are its internal evidences less convincing. The tendency of Christianity is to

assimilate us to God. All other religions have countenanced a vindictive spirit; but the religion of Jesus inculcates universal love. The New Testament lays the greatest stress upon this duty.

The injunction in the text proposes to our view,

I. The duty inculcated—

The term “charity” is to be understood of Christian love—

[Many confine the sense of this term to almsgiving; but almsgiving is a very small part of what is implied in it. Charity includes the whole of our duty towards our neighbours^a.]

This charity or love is our indispensable duty—

[Though an old commandment, it is enjoined as a new one^b. Obedience to it is a sure test of our conversion^c: it is a good evidence of conversion to ourselves^d; it is a satisfactory proof to others also^e. A want of love manifests us to be in an unregenerate state^f.]

It ought to be cordial and “fervent”—

[Worldly courtesy is but a faint image of Christian love. Love, if pure, and subordinate to God, cannot be too fervent. Our love of ourselves is the rule of love to others: our Lord’s love to us is the pattern also of this duty^g.]

We should “above all things” cultivate this disposition—

[Love is the greatest of all Christian graces^h. If we attain to it, we fulfil the law of Christⁱ. But if we be destitute of it, nothing else will profit us^k.]

The children of God should maintain it “among themselves”—

[Benevolence is due even to our enemies. But there is an especial obligation in the saints to love each other^l; their union with Christ, and with each other, demands it^m.]

To promote a more uniform attention to this duty, we will consider,

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

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|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ^a Rom. xiii. 9. | ^b 1 John ii. 7, 8. | ^c 1 John iv. 7, 8. |
| ^d 1 John iii. 14. former part. | | ^e John xiii. 35. |
| ^f 1 John iii. 14. latter part. | | ^g 1 John iii. 16. |
| ^h 1 Cor. xiii. 14. | ⁱ Rom. xiii. 8, 10. | ^k 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. |
| ^l Gal. vi. 10. | ^m 1 Cor. xii. 25. | |

The Apostle's words may be considered as relating to,

1. The sins of others—

["To cover the sins" of others (extenuating what we cannot approve; concealing what we cannot but condemn; and throwing a veil over, not errors only, but "sins," yea, even "a multitude" of sins,) is the proper office of loveⁿ. From this office we should not depart, unless (as in the exercise of the ministerial or magisterial office) the honour of God, and the good of society, require it. A just regard to the great duty of love is of incalculable importance: first, *to ourselves*; for how can we expect to have forbearance exercised towards us, if we refuse it to others? Next, *to the church*; for how can the church be edified, if its members do not walk together in love? And lastly, *to the enemies of the church*, who will not fail to harden themselves in their iniquities, if evil reports in the church, and consequent dissensions and animosities, afford them any occasion. But mutual forbearance will never be exercised as it ought, without a deeply-rooted principle of love^o. Therefore we should cultivate this principle in order to maintain a becoming conduct^p.]

2. Our own sins—

[We must not, for one moment, think that our love, however fervent, can *merit* the pardon of our sins. Yet our pardon *may be*, and certainly *is*, suspended on the exercise of this divine principle. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness^q;

ⁿ 1 Cor. xiii. 7. The duty of love does not, however, preclude ministers from censuring, or magistrates from punishing, the sins of men: they perform those acts *officially*; and in performing them, they obey, instead of violating, the law of love. But to men in their *individual capacity*, the text prescribes an invariable rule of duty. See Matt. xviii. 22.

^o When we hate a person, we are ready on all occasions to speak of his faults; but this is not the way in which we treat those whom we tenderly love.

^p Prov. x. 12. *in our translation* seems to countenance, and almost to establish, this sense of the text; because it appears to have been cited by St. Peter. But the Apostles generally cited rather the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures: and *in that* the two passages do not at all correspond. The LXX. translate it thus: Μῖσος ἐγείρει νεῖκος· πάντας δὲ τοὺς μὴ φιλονεικοῦντας καλύψει φιλία. So that the *apparent* parallelism will not enable us to determine, with certainty, the sense of the text.

^q Matt. v. 7. and vi. 14, 15. and Prov. xvi. 6. See also Gal. vi. 7, 8. and 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19. contrasted with Jam. ii. 13. Daniel even goes so far as to counsel Nebuchadnezzar λυτρώσαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἐν ἐλεημοσύναις.

and the words in the original most naturally bear this sense^r. This sense of them also exactly accords with our Lord's description of the day of judgment^s. Moreover, in this view the Apostle's argument is far stronger than on the other construction of his words. Let it then operate as a strong incentive to mutual love; for "with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again^t."]]

INFER—

1. How justly reprehensible are the generality of Christians!

[There is a proneness in all to receive and propagate reports; but none are willing to have their own reputation blasted. Yet there are few who do not scatter defamation. Let us all be ashamed of and resist this sinful propensity; let us watch against every temptation or desire to indulge it; let us regulate our conduct by the law of love; let us study the Apostle's description of charity^u; and let us attend to the exhortation of St. John^x—.]]

2. How worthy of acceptance is the Gospel of Christ!

[A sense of Christ's love to us produces love to him. When we love Christ aright, we shall love all his members^y. This is the invariable effect wherever the Gospel prevails. The knowledge of our own sins will make us tender towards others. The forgiveness we have received will incline us to forgive others. The extent of Christ's love to us will be the ground of our love to our fellow-sinners^z. Let the Gospel then bring forth this fruit in our hearts and lives; we shall then experience the truth of that Divine assertion^a—. In the exercise of love is the foretaste of heaven itself.]]

^r Καλύψει ἁμαρτίαν means to cover sins from the sight of God, so that they shall not be noticed in the final judgment. See Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. and Neh. iv. 5. In Jam. v. 20, they will also bear that sense: and if we could divest ourselves of prejudice, we should more readily put that construction upon them in that passage; since it is not the converting of souls merely, but the love exercised in seeking to convert them, that entails this blessing on us. If we put a different construction upon them, we make them a mere tautology: but in the sense here affixed to them, they afford a strong additional motive for exertion.

^s Matt. xxv. 34—46. "Come, &c. FOR, &c."—"Depart, &c. FOR, &c."

^t Matt. vii. 2.

^u 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^x 1 John iii. 18.

^y 1 John. v. 1.

^z John xiii. 34.

^a Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

MMCCCCVIII.

PERSECUTION FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

1 Pet. iv. 12—16. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

THE quiet and repose which Christians enjoy at this day, may seem to render a discourse on the subject of persecution quite uninteresting. But the whole New Testament abounds with warnings to expect it, encouragements to endure it, and directions how to conduct ourselves under it: nor is there any intimation given that this state of things was to be confined to the first ages, when Christianity was new in the world; or that "the offence of the cross should ever cease." On the contrary, we are taught to expect, that "they who are born after the flesh only, will hate those who are born after the Spirit;" and that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The circumstance of Christianity having become the national religion, may justly be supposed to have abated somewhat of the fury of persecutors; whilst the protection afforded by the laws of the land keeps within bounds their hostility against those whom they hate for righteousness' sake. But I am not sure that much of our repose may not be ascribed to the low state of religion amongst us: and I cannot but think, that, if God were to pour out his Spirit upon us as he did on the primitive Church, and our light were to burn as bright as theirs, there would yet be found much the

same rancour in the hearts of men against vital godliness now, as there was in former days: for there are not wanting at this hour many proofs of what men would do to suppress real piety, if the toleration accorded to us by the laws did not restrain them. At all events, we know not what trials we ourselves personally may be called to endure, even though the Church at large should still continue to enjoy tranquillity: and for these we ought to be prepared. The words before us are admirably calculated to fortify our minds against all that at any time may come upon us; since, whilst they teach us to expect persecution for righteousness' sake, they shew us,

I. In what light we should view it—

“ We should not think it strange, as though some strange thing happened unto us”—

[God has seen fit to ordain that his people should be subjected to “ fiery trials,” not only for the discovery of their graces, but also for the improvement of them. To them he has given a new nature, altogether different from that which they brought into the world with them,—a nature, which for its excellence may be compared to gold: but there still remains in them much dross, which must be purged away: and, as gold is both ascertained and purified by the action of fire, so must these be tried and purified in the furnace of affliction. Of course, their persecutors have no such object in view: they seek only to suppress the piety that offends them: but God has other, and very opposite, ends to accomplish: He seeks their advancement in the divine life, and will suffer no heavier trial to assault them than what he has strengthened them to bear, and will overrule for their eternal welfare. True it is that, notwithstanding he has taught us to expect these things, we are ready to account them strange: we think it strange that *such trials* should come upon us, and from *such quarters*, and on *us who have done so little to deserve them*. But we should remember, that “ the same trials are accomplished also in our brethren who are in the world^a ;” and that “ none have come upon us but what are common to man, nor any which God will not enable us to sustain^b :” and under this conviction we should receive them as our appointed lot, and submit to them as dispensations ordained by God for our eternal good.]

^a 1 Pet. v. 9.

^b 1 Cor. x. 13.

We should rather regard it as a ground of joy—

[On this subject there is but one testimony throughout all the Holy Scriptures. Our blessed Lord says, “If ye be persecuted for righteousness’ sake, rejoice ye, and leap for joy.” St. Paul tells us, that the true Christian will “glory in tribulations^c” and that he himself actually “took pleasure in them” from the consideration that Christ’s strength would thereby be displayed and glorified^d. St. James bids us “count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations:” and gives it as his deliberate judgment, “We count them happy that endure^e.” St. Peter, as this whole epistle informs us, had the same view of the subject: and therefore we feel warranted in saying to all of you, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.”]

In confirmation of this sentiment, I proceed to shew,

II. What reason we have for viewing it in that light—

Certainly it appears strange and paradoxical that the most cruel persecution for Christ’s sake should be considered as a ground of *joy*. But this view of it is just: for, when we suffer for Christ’s sake,

1. We are made “partakers of Christ’s sufferings”—

[We all know, that if any part of the human body suffer, whether the head or members, the whole participates in the pain. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of his mystical body, and we are the members: and when he suffered on the cross, we suffered with him; as it is written, “We are crucified with Christ;” “we died with him;” “we were buried with him^f.” So when we suffer, he suffers, as it were, with us: as he said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me^g?” “In all our afflictions he is afflicted^h,” and “he who toucheth us, toucheth the apple of his eyeⁱ.” As far as respects an atonement made for sin, he suffered alone: but, that we may be conformed to his image in all things, he has ordained that his Church should complete and “fill up the measure of his sufferings:” so that, though in his own person he is beyond the reach of man’s cruelty, he is still enduring much from it in the persons of his people. In truth, it is not on *their own*

^c Rom. v. 3. ^d 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^f Gal. ii. 20. Rom. vi. 4, 8.

^h Isai. lxiii. 9.

^e Jam. i. 2. and v. 11.

^g Acts ix. 4.

ⁱ Zech. ii. 8.

account that his people suffer any thing. If we would but renounce our allegiance to him, the world would find no more occasion against us. It is for *His sake* that they hate us. They hate not *us*, but *Christ in us*: nor do they persecute *us*, but *Christ in us*. Therefore our sufferings are his; and, in enduring them, “we are truly partakers of his sufferings.”

Now then I would ask, ‘If when he drank the bitter cup even to the dregs, and left, as it were, but a drop for us to taste, shall we account it a hard matter to put it to our lips for his sake?’ No: we should rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of so testifying our love to him.]

2. The Spirit of God descends into our bosom, to support and comfort us—

[The Spirit is here called “The Spirit of glory and of God;” as being one with the Father, who is “the God of glory^k;” and one with the Son, who is “the Lord of glory^l.” His office it is to descend and dwell with the saints, as their Comforter^m. And when we really suffer for Christ’s sake, it is both *an evidence that he does rest upon us*, and *a pledge that he will be with us in a more abundant measure*. If the Holy Spirit had not already wrought faith in our hearts, and put somewhat of the image of Christ upon our souls, the world would have suffered us to rest in peace: for “if we were of the world, the world would love its own; but because we are not of the world, but Christ has chosen us out of the world, therefore the world hateth usⁿ.” But the enmity of the world on account of what we have received from this divine Agent, only serves to call down upon us yet richer communications, even such as shall be sufficient to bear us up under our trials, and to make us conquerors over all our enemies.

And shall not this reconcile us to sufferings? Or, should any trials be deprecated, which are productive of so great a benefit? If the loss of Christ’s bodily presence was a proper ground of joy to the Disciples, because of the presence of THE COMFORTER, who would come to them in his stead^o, much more may any loss or any trials be welcomed by us, if they may but lead to a more abundant effusion of this divine Spirit upon our souls.]

3. God is particularly glorified in us—

[Doubtless, on the part of the persecutors, God is dishonoured and blasphemed; but on the part of the sufferers he is glorified. Behold a man enduring sufferings for righteousness’ sake: what does he say to all who behold him? In respect

^k Acts vii. 2.

^l 1 Cor. ii. 8.

^m John xiv. 16.

ⁿ John xv. 19.

^o John xvi. 6, 7.

of *words*, he may be silent, as a lamb before its shearers: but by his *actions*, he proclaims in accents that cannot be misunderstood, ‘My Lord is worthy of all this: never can I shew my love to him sufficiently: if I had a thousand lives, they would be well disposed of in his service: I am ready to bear any thing for him; and am so far from regretting that my love is thus put to the test, that I am thankful for it, inasmuch as it gives me an opportunity of evincing my sense of his excellency, and the ardour of my love towards him.’

In another view, too, his sufferings advance the glory of God; because they shew how powerful that grace must be, which enables a poor feeble worm to bear them, yea, and to rejoice and glory in them. Many persecutors have been perfectly amazed at the patience of the saints under the most cruel torments that could be inflicted on them: and have been led by the very conduct of the sufferers, not only to embrace the principles which were so mighty in operation, but even to subject themselves to the same torments which they themselves had inflicted upon them.

How does divine grace triumph on such occasions as these! And who would not be willing to suffer, if only Christ might be so magnified, and the efficacy of his grace be so displayed^p?]

4. Our eternal happiness is augmented—

[Soon will that Saviour who once died upon the cross come again in his glory to judge the world. Then will he gather together his elect from every quarter of the world; and bestow on them that recompence of reward, to which, whilst suffering for his sake, they had looked forward. He had told them beforehand, that “if they suffered with him, they should also be glorified together.” He had told them, that their light and momentary afflictions should work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Even whilst they were in this life, he had given them an hundred-fold for all that they had lost or endured for his sake: but *then* will be the time for their “FULL reward.”

Tell me then, I pray you, Will Moses in that day regret that he had “esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?” Or will those feel any regret, who, “when tortured, would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection?” Will any of the Apostles regret that they sealed the truth with their blood? Or will any of you regret that you were “faithful unto death, when God shall put upon your heads the crown of life?” No: one moment of that joy will far overbalance whole years of pain. What then will not be our triumph through all eternity?]

^p Phil. i. 20. 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

But, as this subject may be misapplied, let me shew you,

III. What we should especially guard against, in relation to it—

We must not bring trials on ourselves by any misconduct of our own—

[It is possible enough, that a wild enthusiast may fancy himself at liberty to disregard all human laws, and, whilst suffering for the violation of them, may conceive himself to be bearing the cross of Christ. Even war itself has been waged, under the idea of its being a service acceptable to God: and within our own memory has a spirit of insubordination and rebellion been too lightly cherished under the cloak of religion. But when persons reap the just reward of such conduct, so far are they from honouring God, that they greatly dishonour him, and expose religion itself to hatred and contempt. The being “a busy-body in other men’s matters,” is no uncommon character amongst those who profess religion; and who indulge an assuming, prying, officious spirit, under the idea of rendering a service to God and man. We may also yet more commonly see amongst professors a neglect of their own proper calling; an intrusion into the callings of others; a substitution of services which do not belong to them, in the place of others which are proper to their situation; an impatience of reproof; an unbecoming pertness towards their superiors; and a self-will, that knows no bounds. Ah, brethren! if ye suffer for such conduct as this, think not that ye are to expect any recompence at the hands of God: the cross which you are called to bear is not Christ’s, but your own: and what is inflicted on you by man is only a prelude of a yet sorer punishment that shall be inflicted on you by God, even by that God whom you profess to serve, but whose name you dishonour, and whose displeasure you incur.]

But, if we suffer really as Christians, we may rejoice in all that we endure—

[Our enemies may think that they load us with disgrace: but shame in such a cause is no shame: it is honour: and we may take it up, and bind it on us as a diadem. The Apostles, when imprisoned and scourged for the truth’s sake, “went out from their persecutors, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ.” And thus may we do, turning the very indignities that are cast upon us into an occasion of praise to God. Thus “out of the eater we shall bring forth meat, and out of the strong we shall bring forth sweetness.”]

TWO HINTS, as rising from this subject, I would beg leave to suggest :

I. In embracing religion, be deliberate—

[Religion, sooner or later, will subject you to trials : for our Lord has plainly warned us, that, “if we will be his disciples, we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross, and follow him.” He tells us farther, that, “if we hate not father and mother, and even life itself, for his sake, we cannot be his disciples.” Then, before we profess ourselves his people, we should “count the cost:” we should consider, whether we are willing to “part with all for the pearl of great price.” To what trials we may be subjected, we know not; but we must be prepared for the worst. For I have no hesitation in saying, that it were better never to follow Christ at all, than to follow him for a season, and then turn back from him: “It were better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn away from it: for the last end of such a man is worse than his beginning.”]

2. In maintaining it, be firm—

[If persecution arise for righteousness' sake, you must not be thinking how you may escape it, so much as how you may glorify God under it. I mean not to say, that, “if persecuted in one city, you may not flee to another;” for that liberty was conceded by our Lord himself to his Disciples: but this I mean; that you should not for a moment think of conciliating your enemies by any sinful concession. Your duty to God must be paramount to every other consideration. Your great concern must be, to approve yourselves faithful to him. The Hebrew Youths with the fiery furnace in their view, and Daniel in expectation of the den of lions, thought of nothing but their duty to their God. So you must fear God, and God only. And, if it please God that you should be called to martyrdom itself, be content to “go through much tribulation in your way to the kingdom;” and to ascend to heaven in a chariot of fire.]

MMCCCCIX.

THE END OF UNBELIEVERS.

1 Pet. iv. 17. *What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?*

MANY are the troubles of the righteous: and though their afflictions are not always penal, yet

they are for the most part to be considered as paternal chastisements, and as the judgments which God inflicts on his own household with a view to their advancement in faith and holiness. On the other hand, the enemies of God often triumph, and revel in a fulness of all earthly enjoyments. But the intelligent Christian will see in these dispensations the certainty of a future retribution, when the wicked shall receive the just reward of their wickedness, and he himself be exalted to an inconceivable state of bliss. He will argue thus : If God so afflict his children in the day of his mercy, how will he punish his enemies in the day of his wrath. And, if he so prosper his enemies and load them with benefits in this vale of tears, what prosperity and happiness must he have reserved for his friends in the regions of glory ! If crowns and kingdoms be the portion of many who disregard and despise him, what shall be the inheritance of those who honour and obey him !

Such is the Apostle's mode of arguing in our text ; where, speaking of the trials sustained by Christians, he says, If God's paternal chastisements be so severe, what must his vindictive judgments be ? If judgment first begin at the house of God, what must the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God ?

To impress this solemn consideration upon our minds, we shall shew,

I. Who they are that obey not the Gospel—

To ascertain this, it will be proper to state briefly what the Gospel requires—

[The Gospel supposes men to be in a state of guilt and misery, obnoxious to the wrath of God, and incapable of delivering themselves from it. It proposes to them a remedy of God's appointment : it sets forth Jesus as an all-sufficient Saviour ; and declares that sinners of every description may be washed in his blood, and renewed by his Spirit. But, if we will not apply to him by faith, and thankfully accept his proffered benefits, it dooms us to destruction under the aggravated guilt of despising, and trampling under foot the Son of God. The commission which our Lord gave to his disciples^a,

^a Mark xvi. 15, 16.

and the answer given by Paul to the awakened jailer^b, abundantly confirm this view of the Gospel, and shew that a cordial acceptance of Christ as our only Lord and Saviour is the sum and substance of a Christian's duty.]

According to this statement, very many will be found disobedient to the Gospel:

1. They who neglect Christ altogether—

[This is so obvious a truth that the mention of it seems needless and absurd: but experience proves that the most abandoned sinners, and most avowed infidels, are often insensible of the guilt which they contract. Be it known however, that their excuses or objections will avail them nothing in the day of judgment: their whole lives were one continued act of disobedience to the Gospel; and they will most assuredly be numbered amongst the enemies of their incarnate God. Their rejection of him, whether in principle or practice, will be a decisive evidence of their guilt.]

2. They who unite something else with him as a foundation for their hope—

[The Gospel requires us to renounce all dependence on our own works. However good our works be, they must never for one moment be considered as justifying us before God, either in whole or in part. In Christ alone must be all our hope; and if we attempt to unite any thing of ours with his perfect righteousness, we shall not only not add to our security, but shall altogether invalidate all which Christ himself has done for us. St. Paul asserts this in the plainest terms^c; and from the fullest conviction of its truth desired to be found in Christ, clad with his righteousness, and his only^d.]

3. They who, while they profess to follow Christ, dishonour him by their conduct—

[Many there are who with apparent zeal cry, Lord, Lord, who yet are far from doing the things which he commands. Many, alas! “ profess to know him, but in their works deny him:” they are observant of outward duties, but inattentive to their spirit and temper: instead of being meek and lowly, patient and forgiving, and solicitous only to honour God, they are proud and passionate, covetous and worldly, and studious rather to be thought Christians than really to deserve the name. Let such know that they “ amidst all their appearances of religion deceive themselves, and their religion is vain^e.” By neglecting to walk as Christ walked, they disobey the Gospel, as much as if they rejected him altogether.]

^b Acts xvi. 30, 31. ^c Gal. v. 2, 4. ^d Phil. iii. 9. ^e Jam. i. 26.

To awaken such from their slumbers, we proceed to shew,

II. What their end shall be—

The peculiar manner in which the Apostle speaks of their “end,” intimates that it will be dreadful,

1. Beyond expression—

[In the text St. Peter infers from the trials, which God suffers to come upon believers *here*, the far greater miseries that shall be endured by unbelievers *hereafter*. But his very mode of suggesting this inference shews, that the two states could scarcely admit of any comparison: for what are any transient pains of body inflicted by the most ingenious cruelty of man, when compared with the eternal torments both of soul and body, which will be inflicted on the wicked by the hand of an incensed God? St. Paul institutes a similar comparison, and like St. Peter, leaves our imagination to supply what no language could possibly express^f—. There are indeed terms used in Scripture to represent to us the misery of the damned. They are represented as “cast into a lake of fire and brimstone,” “where the worm of an accusing conscience dieth not, and the fire of God’s wrath is not quenched;” they “weep and wail and gnash their teeth;” and the “smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.” But, awful as these expressions are, they convey no adequate idea of the misery sustained by those who have perished in unbelief: we must say of that, as St. Paul says of the things he heard and saw in the third heavens, that it is unutterable^g.]

2. Beyond a doubt—

[The Apostle appeals to our own consciences for the truth of the inference which he suggests. He says, in effect, What must the state of unbelievers be? Can it be the same with that of obedient believers? Will God put no difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not? Has not the Scripture plainly declared the end of those who disobey the Gospel? And are we not constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence, which the contemners of Christ are taught to expect? Shall *an angel* from heaven be accursed, if he presume to preach any *other* Gospel^h, and shall *we* escape with impunity, if we reject *this*? Our wishes are doubtless in opposition to the declarations of God; but in our judgment we must approve of them; and we shall surely be silent in the day that they shall be enforced, even though we ourselves be the unhappy monuments of God’s displeasure.]

^f Heb. x. 29.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 4.

^h Gal. i. 8.

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How to judge of our state before God—

[Mere morality is by no means a sufficient criterion whereby to judge of our state: we may be free from gross violations of God's law, and yet be far from yielding obedience to the Gospel. Let us then inquire whether we be obeying the Gospel by a simple dependence upon Christ, and by a spirit and temper suited to our profession? This is the test to which we must bring ourselves, since we shall be tried by it at the last day. In vain will be our morality, if Christ be not our only foundation; and in vain will be our professed adherence to Christ, if we do not adorn the Gospel by a holy conversation. Let us then examine ourselves, that we may know beforehand what our end shall be.]

2. The importance of considering our latter end—

[We are ready enough to contemplate the circumstances to which we look forward in the present life; but O, how backward are we to reflect upon our latter end! Yet the events of this life are not worthy of a thought in comparison of eternity. I pray you, brethren, consider how fast your end is approaching, and what it is likely to be, an eternity of bliss in heaven, or an eternity of misery in hell? O, lose not an hour in preparing for your great account! and be careful so to pass through things temporal, that you finally lose not the things eternal — — —]

MMCCCCX.

THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION.

1 Pet. iv. 18. *If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

EARNESTNESS in the concerns of religion is often thought unnecessary; but the attainment of salvation is by no means easy. This appears from the representations which the Scriptures give of religion; a race, a warfare, &c.

The difficulties implied in these metaphors may well alarm the careless. With this view St. Peter suggests the awful query in the text.

I. His assumption—

The Apostle did not mean to express a doubt, but rather to assume a position which he deemed incontrovertible. The point he assumes is, that the righteous are saved with difficulty.

The truth of this position will appear, if it be considered that the righteous are not saved without,

Deep afflictions—

[God's people are for the most part poor and afflicted^a. They have much to endure on account of their religion^b; and trials are for the most part necessary to their growth in grace^c. If they were without affliction of some kind, they would have reason to doubt whether they were God's children indeed^d. Trials are to them, as the furnace to the gold, to purge them from their dross, and to fit them for the service of their God^e.]

Severe conflicts—

[None have made such high attainments, but they still have conflicts to maintain with Satan^f, and their indwelling corruptions^g: it is by these that God keeps them humble^h. The images by which vital religion is set forth (as running, wrestling, fighting,) sufficiently attest the truth of my position. As long as two principles remain within us, our conflicts must remainⁱ.]

Powerful assistances—

[Who can get to heaven without them, or even do anything that is good without them? The aid we need, is such as nothing but Omnipotence can supply^k: if ever we be kept at all, it must be by the power of God himself^l.]

A very slight view of the fact assumed will suffice to shew us the reasonableness of,

II. The appeal he founds upon it—

The appeal is stronger than any mere assertion, inasmuch as it makes every man a judge in his own cause. It clearly intimates, that the perdition of the ungodly is,

1. Most certain—

[The ungodly, no less than the godly, will be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ; but the two will be separated

^a Zeph. iii. 12.

^b 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^c 1 Pet. i. 7.

^d Heb. xii. 8.

^e Heb. xii. 10.

^f Eph. vi. 12.

^g Rom. vii. 15, 23.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 7.

ⁱ Gal. v. 17.

^k Eph. i. 19, 20.

^l 1 Pet. i. 5.

as sheep from the goats, and widely different portions will be assigned unto them^m. How can it be supposed to be otherwise, when *the difference of their characters* is considered? — — — If hell be not an abode fit for the righteous, much less is heaven a proper residence for the ungodly — — —]

2. Most reasonable—

[We confidently appeal even to the ungodly themselves. If such troubles as are often inflicted on the righteous be permitted by God as *the salutary purgations* of his *friends*, what shall be inflicted by God as *the vindictive chastisements* of his *enemies*? If such things come on his friends in this state of *probation*, what shall come on his enemies at the time appointed for *final retribution*? If such be the visitations experienced by his friends in *the day of his mercy*, what must his enemies expect in *the day of his wrath*? Verily I shall wonder if the conscience of any man be either so blind or so obdurate, as not to feel the force of this appeal. If there be such a hardened sinner, let him consult, and provide an answer to, other similar appeals to Holy Writⁿ — — — To “die without mercy” is bad enough; but there is a “much sorer punishment” awaiting his unhappy soul^o.]

SEE—

1. How desirable it is to ascertain your true character—

[Surely it is no difficult matter to ascertain to which of the two forementioned classes you belong. Surely you may soon learn whether you are living in the daily habit of penitence, and faith, and unreserved obedience to your God. If God be true, your eternal state shall correspond with your character, whatever it may be^p — — —]

2. What is that line of conduct which common prudence demands—

[If there were no future state, you might go on in your own ways without much concern; but if repentance, faith, and obedience are essential constituents of the character of the righteous, say, whether it be wise to disregard, or even to defer them? The world may deride a life of piety as folly; but it is true wisdom: yea, “the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom.” Let every one then seek that righteousness, without which no man shall see the Lord.]

^m Ps. i. 5.

^o Heb. x. 28, 29.

ⁿ Heb. ii. 3.

^p Isai. iii. 10, 11.

MMCCCCXI.

ADVICE TO THE PERSECUTED OR TEMPTED.

1 Pet. iv. 19. *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

GOD has mercifully engaged to save his people at the last. They may however meet with many severe conflicts in their way. Nor are they to expect to be saved but with great difficulty. Nevertheless they may safely commit themselves to God, in hope of a happy issue out of all their trials. Hence the Apostle suggests, in a way of inference, the advice in the text.

We propose to shew,

I. What Christians must expect to suffer—

Though all are not called to bear the cross in the same degree, yet all should be prepared to suffer,

1. In their reputation—

[That “fear of God” which the Scriptures represent to be “the beginning of wisdom,” the world considers as the summit of folly. However wise, learned, or discreet any man may be, he cannot escape the imputation of weakness or enthusiasm, if he will “follow the Lord fully.” If our Lord and Master was called Beelzebub, his servants can expect no better name.]

2. In their property—

[In former times the saints have frequently “suffered the loss of all things:” nor is it uncommon now for friends, and even parents, to withdraw their kindness from godly persons on account of their religion. Who does not know that eminent piety is a bar, rather than a help, to promotion? “They then who would be Christ’s disciples, must forsake all, and follow him.”]

3. In their liberty and life—

[Through the tender mercy of our God we are protected by the laws of the land: but none can tell what changes may yet arise: multitudes even in this kingdom have suffered death for Christ’s sake; and, whether called to this trial or not, we should be prepared for it.]

To reconcile us to these dispositions, we proceed to shew,

II. Why it is the will of God that we should suffer—

God is pleased to permit it,

1. For the trial of our faith—

[God can discern our graces, though we should have no opportunity to exercise them; but, if they be not called forth into act, neither have we the comfort of them, nor he the glory: hence God permits “the fiery trial to try us,” that he may discover both to ourselves and others “what great things he has done for us.”]

2. For the advancement of our graces—

[Our graces almost invariably languish when our outward circumstances are easy; but in seasons of difficulty they put forth themselves with strength: though Jesus needed no such stimulus, yet even he was “made perfect through sufferings;” and it is for the accomplishment of the same end, that God has made our road to lie “through much tribulation.”]

3. For the manifestation of his own glory—

[The patience of the saints is a ground of astonishment to the unbelieving world; and the supports which God administers to them fills their hearts with gratitude towards him. But what bursts of praise will resound from the myriads of his redeemed, when all the wonders of his love shall be universally and completely known!]

Satisfied with these appointments of the Deity, let us inquire,

III. What our conduct should be when called to suffer—

The best of men may be brought, as it were, “to their wit’s end”—

But the ADVICE in the text is the most proper that can be given—

1. Let us “commit our souls to God’s care and keeping”—

[We must not attempt to stand in our own strength: nothing less than God’s wisdom and power can defeat the conspiracy that is formed against us: we should make him therefore the manager of our cause, and “the keeper” of our souls.]

2. Let us at the same time persist “in well-doing”—

[We must neither be irritated to do evil, nor deterred from doing good. The more we are persecuted for the sake of Christ, the more studious we should be “to put our enemies to silence by well-doing:” the very efforts of the enemy to extinguish our light should cause it to shine the brighter.]

3. Let us, above all, confide in God “as a faithful Creator”—

[God has promised to “keep the feet of his saints;” and he will perform it: we should suffer nothing to rob us of this confidence: if we “trust firmly in him, we shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved.”]

MMCCCCXII.

HUMILITY INCULCATED.

1 Pet. v. 5. *Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

AS words are nothing more than sounds whereby to convey ideas, it may seem of little importance what words are used, provided that the ideas annexed to them are sufficiently distinct. But I conceive, that the adopting of a word which was in use among the unenlightened heathen, and continuing to use it as they did, when from the superior light of Christianity, we know that all the sentiments and feelings originally annexed to it were bad, has a direct tendency to counteract the Gospel, and to perpetuate the darkness of heathenism in the land. I refer here to the word *pride*; which is frequently used in common conversation, and at the bar, and in the senate, yea and even in the pulpit too, in a good sense; as “a just pride,” and “an honest pride.” But I know no passage of Scripture that sanctions the feelings which are associated with that term: or, if the term be so explained as to convey nothing but what is consistent with Christianity, still I conceive that such an use of it is highly inexpedient, because it tends to foster in the mind an approbation of

sentiments which are in direct opposition to the morality of the Gospel. *Humility* is the grace which alone becomes the Christian moralist; and the cherishing of any feeling contrary to humility, will, as the Apostle informs us in my text, expose us to God's heaviest displeasure.

In confirmation of this, I will endeavour to unfold,

I. The duty here enjoined—

Humility is not a mere insulated grace, if I may so speak, like patience, or meekness, or any other virtue, but a feeling which pervades the whole man, and is called forth into exercise with every grace. Humility is that to the Christian which holiness is to the Deity. Holiness is not a distinct attribute of the Deity, like justice, or mercy, or power, but a perfection that is blended with all the other attributes, and is the crown and glory of them all. So humility is the warp in the Christian's loom: and all other graces, whether of a lively or sombre hue, are the woof, by which the piece is diversified: but from beginning to end, humility pervades it all. On this account, I must speak of humility in a large and extended view, and notice it in all its actings, whether towards God or man.

But there is another reason why this grace must be thus extensively considered; namely, that the Apostle himself here speaks of it in this comprehensive view. If we look at the words which precede my text, we shall find that humility is spoken of as exercised towards men: but in the words immediately following my text, it is connected with our duty to God: "*All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace unto the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*"

Let us then notice this grace,

1. As exercised towards God—

[Here it must begin. We cannot have one spark of real humility till we are abased before God, as guilty, helpless, and

undone creatures, who have no hope but in the tender mercy of God in Christ Jesus. We must, as far as respects all hope in ourselves, feel ourselves in the very condition of the fallen angels, whose sin we have followed, and whose punishment we are doomed to share. Indeed, indeed, this is our very state, whether we know it or not: and it becomes us to seek the knowledge of it, and to live under a sense of it every day, and all the day long. We should never appear either before God or man in any other dress than this. It was the clothing of holy Job when in his most perfect state^a: and so far ought we to be from putting it off because God is reconciled towards us, that a sense of our acceptance with him through Christ should operate as an additional motive for making it the one continual habit of our minds^b. Incessantly should we lie low before him in dust and ashes, and rely altogether upon “his mercy to pardon us, and his grace to help us in every time of need.”]

2. As exercised towards men—

[I forbear to mention any other exercises of this grace towards God, in order that I may keep the subject as simple and intelligible as I can. But in viewing its exercises towards man, I must of necessity diversify it somewhat more. Its chief actings will be found to consist in the following things: we must *regard ourselves* as the lowest of all; and *be willing to be treated by others* as the lowest of all; and gladly *execute the meanest offices*, as the lowest of all.

We must *regard ourselves* as the lowest of all; “esteeming others better than ourselves^c,” and “preferring them in honour before ourselves^d,” and being ready in all places, and on all occasions, to “take the lowest place^e.” It is not indeed necessary that we should accuse ourselves of sins which we have not committed, or deny the superiority of virtue to vice: but we should have such a sense of the peculiar advantages we have enjoyed, and the infinite obligations we lie under, and the consequent aggravations that have attended the many evils which we have committed, that we should account ourselves “less than the least of all saints^f,” yea, the very “chief of sinners^g.”

Nor must we be offended if we be *treated by others* as deserving of this character. It is only from pride and a conceit of something good in us, that we are induced to lay to heart the contempt and ignominy that are cast upon us. If we are sincere in abhorring ourselves, it will be a small matter to us that we are abhorred by others. David deserved not the

^a Job xlii. 5, 6.

^b Ezek. xvi. 63.

^c Phil. ii. 3.

^d Rom. xii. 10.

^e Luke xiv. 10.

^f Eph. iii. 8.

^g 1 Tim. i. 15.

reproaches of his wife Michal: but, when he heard them, instead of being moved with indignation against her, he meekly replied, "I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be base in my own sight^h." It was but a small matter to the holy Apostles, that they were considered "as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all thingsⁱ:" they knew that they deserved nothing but wrath and indignation at the hands of God; and, having obtained mercy of the Lord, they cared not what treatment they met with at the hands of men. To be rendered conformable to our Divine Master in the bitterest reproaches, or the most ignominious death, will, if we be truly humble, be a matter rather of joy and gratitude than of mourning and complaint.

At the same time we must be willing to *take on ourselves the lowest offices*. To become "the servant of all^k" must be our highest ambition. Even the Lord of Glory himself, in the days of his flesh, came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: and this he did, even to the "washing of his disciples' feet^l:" yea, though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "*This is the mind that should be in us^m:*" and this is the example which, as far as circumstances will admit of it, we should follow.

Here is the perfection of humility: and this is the grace which every one of us should be putting on from day to day.]

Nothing can more strongly mark the importance of this duty, than,

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

The declaration, that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble," is cited from the book of Proverbs: and, that it deserves especial attention, is evident from this; that St. James, as well as St. Peter, adduces it for the warning and instruction of the Catholic Churchⁿ.

1. "God resisteth the proud"—

[He does so: he *abhors the very persons* of the proud: "they are an abomination to him^o:" he perfectly scorns them^p:

^h 2 Sam. vi. 22.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 13.

^k Mark x. 44.

^l John xi. 13, 14.

^m Phil. ii. 5—8.

ⁿ See Jam. iv. 6.

^o Prov. vi. 16, 17.

^p Prov. iii. 34. *This is the passage that is cited both by St. Peter and St. James.*

and "knows them afar off," as objects whom he disdains to look upon^q.

He will not hear any prayer that they may offer up. See the Pharisee and the Publican. You would imagine that a man who could make such appeals to God, respecting his manifold and self-denying services, should surely find acceptance at the throne of grace; whilst a man so conscious of his vileness as the Publican was, and with so little to say in his own behalf, should, comparatively at least, be disregarded. But the very reverse was the case; for "the publican went down to his house justified rather than the other:" and this is declared to be the universal rule of God's procedure; for that "every one who exalteth himself shall be abased; but he, and he only, that humbleth himself, shall be exalted^r."

Nor will God communicate to such persons any spiritual blessing. Instead of drawing them to himself, "he will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He will fill the hungry with good things, but the rich he will send empty away^s." Their "esteeming themselves to be rich and increased in goods, and to have need of nothing, when they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," renders them perfectly disgusting in his sight: and the higher they are in their own estimation, the more he nauseates and abhors them^t.

But this is not all; for *he will surely fight against them, to bring them down.* Nebuchadnezzar from his own experience attested, that "those who walk in pride, God is able to abase;" and he might with truth have added also, *is determined to abase.* For the Prophet Isaiah has plainly warned us, that "the lofty looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted: for the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low^u."

Now, I pray you, let this consideration be duly weighed, in order that you may with zeal and earnestness address yourselves to the duty that is here inculcated. If you bring not a broken and contrite spirit before God, and if you exercise not a spirit of meekness and lowliness before men, think not that God will ever look with complacency upon you, or acknowledge himself as your friend: for assuredly he is, and will be, your enemy, and will sooner or later resent the dishonour which you do unto him. He may not inflict on you such judgments as he did on Nebuchadnezzar or on Herod: if he only leave you to yourselves, you will soon find what an evil

^q Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

^r Luke xviii. 14.

^s Luke i. 51, 53.

^t Rev. iii. 16, 17.

^u Isai. ii. 11, 12.

and bitter thing it is to cherish such a disposition in your hearts: for, as “pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall^x,” you may expect the effects of a spiritual dereliction; you may expect, that, “being lifted up with pride, you will fall into the condemnation of the devil^y.”]

2. He “giveth grace unto the humble”—

[What will he not do for those who are of an humble and contrite spirit? If there were but one such object in the whole universe, God would look through all the shining ranks of angels that surround his throne, and fix his eyes on him^z: he would even come down to him, and dwell with him; yea, and dwell with him for the express purpose of comforting and reviving his drooping soul^a. If he offered up a prayer, God would hear and answer it^b: if, on any sudden emergency, he only poured forth a cry, God would attend to it, and not forget it^c: and if there were only a desire in his heart, even that should be noted, in order to satisfy and fulfil it^d. See this exemplified in King Josiah. God had determined to destroy Jerusalem: but because Josiah was of an humble spirit, he would first take him to himself, and not suffer him to witness the calamities which were coming upon his nation: “Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst *humble thyself* before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and *humbledst thyself* before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me, I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord^e.” See it yet more strongly illustrated in the case of the most wicked man that perhaps ever existed upon the face of the earth, the man that made the very streets of Jerusalem to run down with the blood of innocents, and set up his idols in the very House of God: see it, I say, in the case of King Manasseh; of whom it is said, “When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and *humbled him greatly* before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him:” behold! of this man it is said, “God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication^f.”]

Say now, whether here be not encouragement enough to seek humility? Find an humble person to whom God ever refused any thing. You cannot. A humble person may be “cast down for a time; but he shall soon be lifted up: for *God will save the humble person^g*.”]

What shall I then ADD to these considerations?

[You need no other inducement to work either upon your

^x Prov. xvi. 18.

^y 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^z Isai. lxvi. 2.

^a Isai. lvii. 15.

^b Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

^c Ps. ix. 12.

^d Ps. x. 17.

^e 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.

^f 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

^g Job xxii. 29.

hopes or fears. To have God your enemy, determined to "resist you," would be the greatest evil that could befall you: but to have him your friend, pledged to supply you with all the blessings of grace and glory, would be the summit of human bliss. Commending then this alternative to your devoutest meditations, I would say to all of you, in the animated language of the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city^h." There is nothing so "becoming to one of God's elect, as humbleness of mindⁱ," nor any ornament he can wear so pleasing to his God^k. Come then, beloved, and clothe yourselves with humility; and wear it so at all times, that you may be known by it, as a man is by his accustomed dress: so shall "God be glorified in you," and all who behold you be compelled to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."]

^h Isai. lii. 1.

ⁱ Col. iii. 12.

^k 1 Pet. iii. 4.

MMCCCCXIII.

THE DUTY OF CASTING OUR CARE ON GOD.

1 Pet. v. 7. *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

INEXPERIENCED Christians are generally partial in their views of religion. They often exalt one duty, to the neglect, if not the exclusion of another: but a proficiency in the divine life will discover itself by the united exercise of the various, and apparently opposite, graces. Faith will not exclude fear, nor meekness fortitude. Every grace will be limited and tempered by some other. The soul must be humbled before God in dust and ashes: yet should it rely on him with most implicit confidence^a.

I. The duty of Christians—

Christians have learned "not to seek great things for themselves." Hence they are free from the corroding cares of avarice and ambition—

But they still have many grounds of care—

[They cannot but feel some concern respecting their bodily wants: the casualties of life may also occasion some uneasiness; but they have other cares far more weighty and important:

^a ver. 6, 7.

they see many dishonouring their holy profession: they feel within themselves also “an evil heart of unbelief;” nor are they ignorant of Satan’s devices to overthrow them. Moreover, they frequently anticipate future evils; and tremble, lest in the day of adversity they should faint. Thus do they torment themselves with anxious and desponding fears.]

It is their duty, however, to “cast their care on God”—

[To cast their care upon any creature would be fruitless, and it would involve them in the deepest guilt^b. God alone is able to sustain their burthen: on him they are commanded to cast it^c: they must do so in the exercise of faith and prayer^d; nor are any cares whatever to be excepted, “Cast *all* your care,” &c.: none are so small but they shall be regarded, none so great but they shall be alleviated.]

There is a backwardness in many, to comply with this duty.

II. Their encouragement to perform it—

God extends his care to the whole creation; but in a more especial manner careth for his people—

[He conducted the Jews through the wilderness: he interposed for them in all their dangers: he supplied their every want^e. Thus, though less visibly, he still regards those who trust in him. He watches over them for good^f: he limits and restrains all their adversaries^g: he sympathizes with them in all their afflictions^h: he imparts to them all temporal and spiritual blessingsⁱ: he hears and answers all their supplications^k: he accounts them his most inestimable treasure^l: he communes with them as his sons and daughters^m: he takes upon him the management of all their concernsⁿ.]

What encouragement does this afford us to trust in him!

Our Guardian and Protector is infinitely *wise*—

[He knows what trials we stand in need of: he can suit all the circumstances of them to our necessities: he can over-rule them for our eternal benefit.]

^b Jer. xvii. 5.

^c Ps. lv. 22.

^d Phil. iv. 6, 7.

^e Ps. cv. 39—41.

^f 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

^g Ps. lxxvi. 10.

^h Isai. lxiii. 9. Heb. iv. 15.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

^k John xv. 7.

^l Mal. iii. 17.

^m 2 Cor. vi. 18.

ⁿ Isai. xlvi. 4.

^o Isai. xxviii. 29.

He is possessed of *almighty* power^p—

[There is no difficulty from which he cannot extricate^q, nor duty which he cannot enable us to discharge. Should we, for whom such wisdom and power are exercised, be anxious^r?]

Moreover he is *good* and *gracious*—

[What innumerable blessings has he already bestowed upon us! He has even given his own Son to die for us. What then can we have to fear, if we trust in him^s?]

Above all, he is a *faithful* God—

[He has promised seasonable protection and strength^t. And is not his word a sure ground of confidence^u? Surely then we should be filled with consolation rather than with care^x.]

INFER—

1. How needful is it that all should acquaint themselves with God!

[Gaiety and dissipation may bear up the spirit in prosperity; but God alone can comfort us in adversity^y. At the hour of death we shall all need Divine support. Let the careless then begin to reflect upon their state: let them provide a refuge against the day of trouble: let them follow that salutary advice^z—.]

2. How happy would Christians be if they rightly enjoyed their privileges!

[It is their privilege to be “without carefulness^a.” If they trusted in God as they ought, nothing could disturb them^b. Hence that exhortation to joy in God—^c. Let the afflicted saints then commit themselves to him^d: let them know that duty is theirs, but events are his: let them, in the face of all difficulties, adopt the words of Joshua^e—: let them, with Hezekiah, repose themselves on God^f.]

^p Job xl. 2. ^q Isai. l. 2. and xliii. 13.

^r Isai. xl. 27, 28. ^s Rom. viii. 32.

^t Isai. liv. 10. Deut. xxxiii. 25. 1 Cor. x. 13.

^u 2 Sam. xxii. 31. Heb. x. 23.

^x Heb. vi. 18.

^y Job xxxv. 10.

^z Job xxii. 21.

^a 1 Cor. vii. 32.

^b Isai. xxvi. 3.

^c Ps. v. 11, 12.

^d Mic. v. 4.

^e Numb. xiv. 9.

^f 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.

MMCCCCXIV.

THE MEANS OF DEFEATING SATAN'S MALICE.

1 Pet. v. 8, 9. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith.*

THERE are many who deny the influences of the Holy Spirit. No wonder therefore if the agency of Satan be called in question. But there is abundant proof in the Scriptures that Satan exercises a power over the minds of men. St. Peter had learned this truth by bitter experience.

In this view the caution he gives us is worthy of particular attention:

I. The malice of Satan—

Satan is the great adversary of mankind. It was he who caused the fall of our first parents^a. He has exerted a similar influence over all their descendants. He still maintains his enmity against the seed of the woman^b. He is justly compared to “a roaring lion.”

He is subtle—

[The lion prowls with subtilty in search of prey: this is noticed in David's description of wicked men^c—. Satan also uses many devices to destroy souls^d. He suits his temptations to us with astonishing craft: he draws us into his snare before we are aware of his designs^e. To be acquainted with his devices is a most eminent and useful part of Christian knowledge^f.]

He is active—

[The lion ranges far and wide in search of his prey; and Satan “walks to and fro throughout the earth^g.” he ceases not from his exertions day or night^h. He is the more diligent as knowing that his time is limitedⁱ. He has legions of emissaries acting in concert with him^k. If at any time he suspend his

^a Gen. iii. 1—5.

^d Eph. vi. 11.

^g Job i. 7. and the text.

ⁱ Rev. xii. 12.

^b Gen. iii. 15.

^e 2 Cor. ii. 11.

^k Mark v. 9.

^c Ps. x. 9, 10.

^f 2 Cor. ii. 11.

^h Rev. xii. 10.

attacks, it is but for a season, that he may return afterwards with greater advantage¹.]

He is cruel—

[The lion little regards the agonies which he occasions; nor has Satan any compassion for the souls which he destroys. The savage animal kills to satisfy the calls of nature; but our adversary reaps no benefit from the destruction of men. His exertions serve only to increase his own guilt and misery; yet is he insatiable in his thirst for our condemnation^m.]

He is powerful—

[Feeble is the resistance of a lamb against the voracious lion: still more impotent are men before “the god of this world.” Satan has a limited power over the elements themselvesⁿ. The ungodly are altogether subjected to his will^o; nor would the saints have the smallest power to resist him, if God should deliver them into his hands^p.]

If we believe this representation of Satan's malice, we cannot but desire to know,

II. The means of defeating it—

Our adversary, though great, is not invincible. There is one stronger than he, that can overcome him^q; and God has prescribed means whereby *we* also may vanquish him :

Moderation—

[An undue attachment to the things of time and sense gives him a great advantage over us. He will not fail to assault us on our weak side^r; but a deadness to the world will in some measure disarm him. He prevailed not against our Lord, because he found no irregular affection in him^s; nor could he so easily overcome us if we disregarded earthly things. A contempt of life has been a principal mean whereby the saints and martyrs in all ages have triumphed over him^t.]

¹ Compare Luke iv. 13. with Luke xxii. 53.

^m This is strongly intimated in the word *καταπιη*, “he would swallow us up.”

ⁿ Job i. 12, 19. He is called “the prince of the power of the air.”

^o Eph. ii. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^p Many who have appeared lights in the Church have been swept away by the tail of this great dragon, Rev. xii. 3, 4.

^q Luke xi. 21, 22.

^r It was he who instigated Judas to treachery, and Ananias to falsehood; but he wrought by means of their covetousness, John xiii. 2. Acts v. 3.

^s John xiv. 30.

^t Rev. xii. 11.

Vigilance—

[Unwatchfulness, even in a victorious army, exposes it to defeat: much more must it subject us to the power of our subtle enemy. St. Peter had experienced its baneful effects. He had been warned of Satan's intention to assault him^u. He had been commanded to pray lest he should fall by the temptation^x; but he slept when he should have been praying^y. He stands in this respect, like Lot's wife^z, a monument to future generations; but vigilance on our part will counteract the designs of Satan. The armed Christian, watching unto prayer, must be victorious^a.]

Fortitude—

[The timid Christian falls into a thousand snares^b. The only way to obtain a victory is, to fight manfully; and this is the duty of every follower of Christ^c. We must never give way to Satan^d. We are called to wrestle and contend with him^e; nor shall our resistance be in vain^f.]

Faith—

[Unbelief is a powerful instrument in the hands of Satan. He excites it in us that he may turn us from the faith: we must therefore hold fast *the doctrines of faith*. We should not suffer ourselves to be moved from the hope of the Gospel: this is our anchor whereby we must outride the storm^g. We must also steadfastly exercise *the grace of faith*. This is the weapon whereby we overcome the world^h; and by this shall we triumph over Satan himselfⁱ.]

APPLICATION—

[Let not the ungodly despise this adversary; but let them seek deliverance from him through the Gospel^k; and let the godly be continually on their guard against him^l, so shall they experience that promised blessing^m—]

^u Luke xxii. 31. ^x Luke xxii. 40. ^y Luke xxii. 45, 46.

^z Luke xvii. 32. ^a Eph. vi. 18. ^b Prov. xxix. 25.

^c Eph. vi. 10, 13. ^d Eph. iv. 27. ^e Eph. vi. 12.

^f Jam. iv. 7. Satan is not only checked but *terrified*, and vanquished, by the resistance of the weakest Christian.

^g Heb. vi. 19. ^h 1 John v. 4. ⁱ Eph. vi. 16.

^k Acts xxvi. 18. ^l 2 Cor. xi. 3. ^m Rom. xvi. 20.

MMCCCCXV.

GOD'S GOODNESS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAYER.

1 Pet. v. 10, 11. *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

AMONGST the various testimonies of affection which faithful ministers will give to their people, that of praying for them is the most unequivocal, and most important. And in this the Apostles eminently distinguish themselves in all their epistles. In the petitions before us, we behold the glowing zeal of Peter, studious to exalt the honour of his God, and to promote to the utmost the welfare of the saints.

His words scarcely admit of any profitable distribution: we shall therefore make some observations on them, in the order in which they lie.

The first thing that calls for our attention is, the honourable appellation he gives to God—

[God is the only fountain of all grace. There is none in the creature, which has not been derived from him^a. But in him is “all grace;” converting, comforting, sanctifying, establishing grace. He is “the God of” all grace: all kinds of it, and all degrees, are in him. Whatever be the grace that we severally want, we shall find an inexhaustible fulness of it treasured up in him. And, if we ask of him in terms of the most extensive import, and then stretch our imaginations far beyond what it is in the power of language to express, it still will be true, that “he giveth *more* grace^b,” and giveth it *freely* too, according to his own sovereign will^c, even to the very chief of sinners.]

Next we have an account of what God has done for his believing people—

[God has “called them,” not merely by the outward ministry of his Gospel, (for that he has vouchsafed to thousands who reject him,) but by the inward operation of his grace. Nor is it to any common mercy that he has called

^a John i. 16.

^b Jam. iv. 6.

^c Matt. xx. 15. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

them, but to "his glory," yea, to the "eternal" enjoyment of it. What a stupendous act of grace! — — — Yet this is greatly heightened by the means which he has used for the communication of this blessing. He has sent it by *the ministry*, (by *the ministry*, do I say?—hear, O ye heavens, and be astonished, O earth!) He imparts it through *the mediation* of "Christ Jesus," his only dear Son.

O that this glorious description of the Deity might always be remembered by us in our addresses at the throne of Grace!]

The petitions which the Apostle offered on behalf of the saints, were exactly such as their state required—

[They were now enduring "a great fight of afflictions:" and, in order that they might persevere unto the end, it was necessary that they should be "established" in *the faith*, "strengthened" in *the profession*, and "settled" in *the enjoyment* of the Gospel. For these things therefore the Apostle prayed; knowing, by bitter experience, that they must come from God, the only Author of such inestimable blessings^d. For these things also should our prayers be offered: and *the consideration of what God is in himself, and has done for us, may well encourage us to offer the most enlarged petitions*. If we "open our mouth ever so wide, we need not doubt but that he will fill it^e."]]

His prayers, however, were qualified with a very necessary concession—

[God has not given us any reason to expect an exemption from suffering: on the contrary, he has told us plainly, that our road to heaven lies through much tribulation^f. Even "Christ himself was made perfect through sufferings;" and every child of man must be conformed to him in this respect. Sufferings are sent to try, to illustrate, and to confirm our grace; and finally, to work out for us a proportionable weight of glory. The Apostle therefore did not presume to interfere with the established order of things; but only to pray, that their trials might be as light and transient, as would consist with the accomplishment of their proper ends^g. In this respect he sets us a good example; and teaches us to desire rather a sanctified use of our afflictions, than a premature removal of them.]]

To these he added a doxology well suited to the occasion—

^d αὐτὸς, though not noticed in the translation, seems to have considerable force.

^e Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^f Acts xiv. 22.

^g ὀλίγον παθόντας.

[Who can reflect on what God is in himself, or on what he has done for us, or on what he is ready to do for us, and not desire that his name may be glorified, and that every thought may be subjected to his holy will? When the Apostle says, "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever;" who is not ready to exclaim with ardent affection, "Amen, and amen?"

O brethren, let such views occupy our attention, and such prayers and praises be ever ascending from the altar of our hearts!]

This subject may be of USE,

1. For reproof—

[How far are the generality of professing Christians from such exalted views of God, or such deep concern for the welfare of men's souls! If they think of God in the quality of a Governor and Judge, they are not conscious of any defect, though they scarce ever raise their minds to him as their adorable Benefactor: and, if they occasionally promote the comfort of men's bodies, they seem to themselves excused for not attending to their souls. But, beloved, let us not be contented to live in so low a region, or to exercise so little grace: but let our love to God and man bear some affinity and proportion to the love that God has shewn to us.]

2. For encouragement—

[What is there that we may not expect at the hands of such a God? We may go to him for ourselves; we may go to him for others: we may ask of him all manner of grace: the weakest may obtain strength; and the most wavering may obtain establishment in the divine life. Let us know the privilege of prayer. Let us, especially under our afflictions, betake ourselves to a throne of grace: and if, while we are praying to him, our trials increase^h, let us not be discouraged: only let us tarry his leisure; and our sorrows shall ere long be turned to joy, and *our prayers to praise*ⁱ.]

^h This was the case with the Israelites, *Exod. v. 5—19.* with *xii. 33.*

ⁱ *Eph. iii. 20.*

2 P E T E R.

MMCCCCXVI.

PETER'S SALUTATION TO THE SAINTS.

2 Pet. i. 1, 2. *Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.*

IN reading the epistles of the different Apostles, whether written to particular Churches, or to the whole catholic Church throughout the world, we cannot but be struck with the benevolence which they breathe in every part, and especially in the salutations with which they begin, and the benedictions with which they close. In the words which we have now read, which, as in the former epistle, are addressed to the whole Church scattered through the Roman empire, we may notice two things,—an inscription—and a salutation: to both of which we will now turn your attention.

I. The inscription—

Here the Apostle describes,

1. The writer—

[His own proper name was Simon, or Simeon, as he is called in the original and by the Apostle James^a. The name Peter was given to him by his Lord on two different occasions; partly, to mark his characteristic boldness; and partly to

^a Acts xv. 14.

intimate, that on his testimony both to Jews and Gentiles the Christian Church should be established^b. The office he held as a servant and an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ was the highest that could be assigned to mortal man: and the peculiar care which he took in thus designating his own name and character satisfies our minds that this epistle, no less than the former which bears his name, was written by him: for no bad man would have written it; and no good man could have been guilty of such a forgery as that of assuming the name and office of this inspired Apostle.]

2. The persons addressed—

[These were believers throughout the world. They “had faith” in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Saviour of fallen man. They had “obtained” this faith, not by any efforts of their own, but, as it were, *by lot*, just as all the tribes of Israel obtained their portion in the promised land. To each the precise measure was assigned by God himself: nor was there one throughout the whole land who was not constrained to acknowledge that he owed his portion solely to the free and sovereign grace of God^c — — — This faith was precisely “the same” whether in Apostles or private Christians, and “alike precious” to them all: for though the faith of different persons might differ widely in its degrees and consequent operations, it was “alike precious” to all, inasmuch as it was the one means of uniting them to Christ, and of saving their souls alive — — — “Through the righteousness of God our Saviour” too was this faith obtained: for by that righteousness it was purchased for them; and through the prevalence of that righteousness, as pleaded with God in their behalf, was the gift of faith imparted to them — — —

In this respect, then, every saint under heaven answers to the character drawn by the Apostle, and may consider the epistle as addressed personally to his own self in particular, as much as ever it was to the saints in the Apostle's days.]

From the inscription we pass on to,

II. The salutation—

“Grace and peace” comprehended all the blessings of the Gospel—

[Sometimes, in the salutations of the Apostles, “mercy” is added; “Grace, mercy, and peace:” but generally it is, as here, “Grace and peace.” By “Grace” I understand all that is necessary for the transformation of the soul into the Divine image; and by “peace,” all that is necessary for the

^b John i. 42. Matt. xvi. 18.

^c λαχουσι.

comfort and encouragement of the soul in its progress heavenward — — —]

These the Apostle desired to be “multiplied” unto the saints—

[There should be no measure of these in which we should rest; seeing that there is no measure which may not be greatly and abundantly increased. We should therefore, even if our attainments were equal to those of the Apostle Paul, “forget what is behind, and reach forth to that which is before” — — —]

They are to be multiplied solely “through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” —

[It is by that knowledge alone that grace and peace are at first obtained: when we look to God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, then grace and peace flow down into our souls^d. In like manner, it is only through an increasing acquaintance with this mystery that we grow up into Christ, and are transformed into his image^e. Contemplate then more and more the wonders of redeeming love: and be assured, that in proportion as you are enabled to comprehend them, you shall “be filled with all the fulness of God^f.”]

ADDRESS—

[Receive this as a faithful expression of my regards for you: and pray for me, that what I desire in your behalf, I may richly experience in my own soul.]

^d John xvii. 3. 2 Cor. iv. 6. ^e 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^f Eph. iii. 18, 19.

MMCCCCXVII.

EVERY THING NEEDFUL PROVIDED FOR US.

2 Pet. i. 3. *His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.*

THE Lord Jesus Christ, as Mediator, procures for us all blessings from God: but, as God, he authoritatively imparts them. It is of *him* that the Apostle speaks, when he says, “*His* divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” But the words which follow my text are of more doubtful interpretation. Some understand them as importing, that these things are given for the acknowledgment of God, who has called us by the

mighty working of his power. This rendering of the words is so extremely different from that which our translators have given us, and at the same time is maintained by so many persons of eminence, that I have chosen rather to wave the consideration of them altogether, than to determine which of the two is the more correct: though I cannot but say, that I prefer the sense that is given us in our authorized translation. The words before us convey a most important truth, which I shall endeavour to illustrate. The Lord Jesus has indeed given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,

I. In a way of general provision—

In his blessed word, he has given to us, and to the whole world,

1. Instructions—

[There is nothing needful for us to know, but it may be found in the Scriptures of truth. There we are informed how a sinner may be reconciled to his offended God — — — There we see how we may obtain a new nature, and be renewed after the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness — — — There we are told how we may walk so as to please and honour God — — — Nothing is omitted there, which can conduce, either to our obtaining of life, or to our possessing of vital godliness. And whatever has been added by man, has a tendency rather to counteract than forward our eternal interests — — —]

2. Promises—

[These are “exceeding great and precious,” and comprehend every thing which our necessities require. Place us in any situation that can possibly be imagined, and there will be found a promise directly applicable to our state. Nor is any thing required of us, in order to obtain an interest in these promises: if only we have a desire after the things promised, and a willingness to receive them as the free gift of God for Christ’s sake, they become ours, and shall be fulfilled to us: and by them we shall be made partakers of that very godliness which might be supposed to be a necessary pre-requisite for an interest in them. We are not first to cleanse ourselves from sin, and then lay hold on the promises; but first to take the promises, and then, by their influence, to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.”]

3. Examples—

[The force of example is pre-eminently great, as affording us both direction and encouragement. And there is no grace which we can be called to exercise, but we have it exhibited and embodied in some bright pattern that is set before us. As for faith, the first leading grace from which almost all others flow, the examples of it are innumerable; and the powers which it possesses to elevate the soul are displayed in the strongest colours. Would we wish to know the precise operations of patience and meekness? the lives of Job and of Moses afford us most distinguished patterns. Would we behold fidelity, devotion, and the constraining influence of love? Elijah, David, Paul, say to us, 'Be followers of us, and ye shall attain these graces in perfection.' Such examples as these, not to mention any others of a different kind, which are "set forth for our admonition," serve to explain the precepts, and to shew us what measure of godliness we should aspire after, and may hope to attain. So that nothing is wanting to us, that can by any means help us forward in the divine life.]

But the Lord Jesus Christ has, to his obedient followers, given all things also,

II. In a way of special communication—

The instructions, promises, examples, which are contained in the Holy Scriptures, are common to all; but to his peculiar people the Lord Jesus Christ has given graces, which, by his divine power, he has wrought in their souls. On them he has bestowed,

1. The gift of faith—

[This grace is essential to the welfare of every child of man; for it is through it alone that either life or godliness can be brought into the soul. But he enables his people to come to him, and lay hold on him, and to embrace his promises; and to draw forth out of his fulness all needful supplies, both of grace and peace. In their minds he works a conviction, that they have nothing in themselves to recommend them to God, and can do nothing whereby to obtain an interest in his favour. To them he makes himself known, as "the way, the truth, and the life;" and he brings them to "live altogether by faith in Him, who has loved them, and given himself for them."]

2. The assistances of his grace—

["Without him they can do nothing:" but "through strength communicated by him, they are enabled to do all things." Have they to conflict with Satan, and withstand his assaults? They go forth in the strength of Christ, and are

made "more than conquerors:" not all the powers of darkness can stand before them. Have they to sustain the heaviest afflictions? Through Christ they are enabled to "glory in tribulations;" and to "take pleasure in every species of distress for his sake," under a full assurance that "his strength shall be made perfect through their weakness;" and that "he shall be magnified in their body, whether by life or death." Whatever they have either to do or suffer, "his grace his sufficient for them;" and his divine power "makes them perfect in every good work to do his will, working in them that which is well-pleasing in his sight."]

3. The consolations of his Spirit—

[These are of prime necessity in the divine life; for "the joy of the Lord is our strength." Without the light of God's countenance lifted up upon us, our "hands will hang down, our knees be feeble, and our hearts faint." But he will send to his people the Comforter, according to his word, to be in them "a Spirit of adoption," "a witness of their relation to him," and "an earnest of their eternal inheritance." This will support them under all their trials, and animate them in all their conflicts, and bear them up above all the concerns of time and sense. With "his love shed abroad in their hearts," nothing will move them: "nor will they count their lives dear unto them, if only they may but fulfil his will, and finish their course with joy."]]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us inquire whether these blessings have indeed been conferred on us—

[As possessing the Book of Revelation, we have free access to all the benefits contained in it. But have we availed ourselves of this liberty, so as to have become partakers of the blessings themselves? How many are there who name the name of Christ, and yet have never received any thing from him but the name! Look ye well to this matter, my dear brethren; for, if ye be not brought to live *by* him, and *for* him, and *to* him, it were better that ye had never heard the Gospel at all; yea, and better that Christ himself had never come into the world.]

2. Endeavour to make a just improvement of them—

[If we are responsible to God for the *offers* of salvation, which are given to the whole world, much more are we for those special communications which are made only to God's peculiar people. Have you light in your understandings? follow it with holy assiduity, and with a tender conscience;

never "hiding it under a bushel," or "shutting it up in unrighteousness." Have you good desires in your hearts? Labour to carry them into effect; and rest not till you have attained the object for which they were given. Let every grace "have its perfect work in you, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."]

3. Impart liberally to others what the Lord Jesus has so liberally conferred on you—

[It is not for yourselves only that Christ has bestowed on you such blessings; but that you may be instruments in his hands to impart them to others. Have you the Holy Scriptures? Put them, if possible, into the hands of every child of man. Are you instructed in the knowledge of them? Send out missionaries into the world, to instruct the heathen, and to bring your Jewish brethren to the knowledge of that Saviour whom their fathers crucified. Endeavour, too, that the rising generation be imbued with the principles of our holy religion, and be made partakers of all the benefits which you yourselves enjoy^a — — — "Freely we have received; freely give:" and let every blessing that ye possess be regarded as a talent to be improved for the Lord, and to be accounted for to him at his judgment-seat.]

^a If this subject be treated with a view to the advancement of a *Bible Society*, *Mission Society*, *Jews' Society*, or *Charity* or *Sunday Schools*, the appropriate idea here touched upon must be amplified and enforced.

MMCCCCXVIII.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THE PROMISES.

2 Pet. i. 4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

COMMENTATORS are not agreed with respect to the connexion of these words. Some connect "whereby" with "glory and virtue," in the preceding verse; and understand it thus: "*By which glorious energy of the Gospel* are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." Others, understanding the third verse parenthetically, connect my text with "God and Christ," in the second verse, and translate the passage thus: "*By whom* are given unto us," and so on. But, for the use which I am about to make

of the passage, it is of no importance to determine precisely what the connexion is. It is to the greatness and preciousness of the promises that I propose to direct your attention : and, therefore, waving any further notice of the context, I will open to you the promises of God, and shew you,

I. Their intrinsic worth—

But how shall I attempt this ? Shall I bring them all in order before your eyes ? Many hours would not be sufficient for this arduous undertaking : let it suffice, then, to say,

They extend to all the necessities of sinful man—

[Even the things of this life are frequently and fully comprehended in them: for St. Paul says, “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come^a.” And our blessed Lord has assured us, that, if we “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all needful things shall be added unto us^b.” But “the things which pertain unto life and godliness^c” are those which are more immediately referred to in my text: and there is no want which an immortal soul can feel, in reference either to time or to eternity, which is not richly provided for in the promises of our God. Pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory, are all secured to us, in terms the most explicit that language can afford. Nor, if men had been permitted to dictate unto God what things should be made over to them, or how freely they should be bestowed, could they ever have ventured to express what God has expressed, or to ask them on such easy terms: for all the promises are to be apprehended simply by faith, and to be possessed by all who will truly and unfeignedly rest upon them^d.]

But fully to declare their worth is impossible—

[Who shall appreciate a deliverance from the torments which are endured by those who are now cast into the lake of fire and brimstone? or, who shall form a correct estimate of the glory and felicity of heaven? None but those who have experienced the one or the other can form any just conception of either: nor could any one fully and adequately comprehend what *salvation* imports, unless he have both endured the evil from which a condemned soul is rescued, and partaken of the

^a 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^b Matt. vi. 33.

^c ver. 3.

^d Such a passage as Jer. xxxi. 33, 34, may be adduced as a brief specimen.

blessedness to which a glorified soul is exalted before the throne of God. Eternity will be too short to count the inestimable worth of the exceeding great and precious promises which are contained in the Gospel of Christ.]

Let us pass on to consider,

II. Their sanctifying efficacy—

We must not imagine that any sinner can so “partake of the Divine nature” as really to be united to the Divine essence. *That* is impossible. But to partake of all the communicable perfections of the Deity, is the privilege of all who believe in Christ—

We are exalted to bear a strict resemblance to the Deity—

[In *mind*, in *will*, in our whole *character*, we may resemble God: for, in conversion, we “are renewed in *knowledge* after the image of Him that created us^e,” so that we view every thing no longer according to the apprehensions of our corrupt nature, but as taught of God, and enlightened by his Holy Spirit. With a renovated understanding we receive also a new heart; so that, instead of finding our will opposed to the will of God, “we *delight in the law of God* after our inward man^f,” and desire to do his will even as it is done in heaven. I say not too much, if I add, that the very *character* of God is imparted to his saints, even as the impression of a seal to the melted wax; so that, through the operation of his grace upon them, they become “holy, even as he is holy,” and “perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect.” As for “the corruptions that are in the world through lust and inordinate desire, the true believer escapes from them:” he renounces the world and all its vanities: he “becomes crucified to it by the cross of Christ^g,” he rises above it, “keeps himself unspotted from it^h,” and has his “conversation altogether in heavenⁱ.”]

And by what is all this effected, but by the promises of God?

[“*By these* we become partakers of the Divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.” St. Paul is particularly careful in marking this important truth. He traces not any of these benefits to mere human efforts, but simply to faith in the Lord Jesus, which alone can “overcome the world^k,” and “purify the heart^l.” Hear his words; and

^e Col. iii. 10.

^f Rom. vii. 22.

^g Gal. vi. 14.

^h Jam. i. 27. Rev. iii. 4.

^l Phil. iii. 20.

^k 1 John v. 4.

^l Acts xv. 9.

mark especially the *order* which he prescribes for the attainment of these blessings: “*Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God^m.*” Here, at the same time that he specifies the extent to which the promises will effect this change, he shews us, that we are not to attain the change first, and then lay hold on the promises; but first to lay hold on the promises, and by them to attain the change. Now, this is a point of extreme importance; and it was marked with singular precision in the Jewish law. In the ordinance for the cleansing of the leper, it was appointed that the blood of his sacrifice should be put upon the tip of his right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right footⁿ; which was to shew, that, in all his faculties, whereby he either *received* or *executed* the will of God, even from head to foot, he needed an application of the blood of atonement, to cleanse him from his guilt: and then oil was not only to be applied by the priest to the same places, but to be “*put upon the very place of the blood of the trespass-offering.*” And what was this intended to shew? I hesitate not to say, it was intended to declare the very same thing which is intimated in my text; namely, that our justification by the blood of atonement must be first sought, and then our sanctification by the Holy Spirit; that the blood of atonement must be the foundation of our sanctification; and that, though the two are never to be separated, they must be sought in their due order, and be put each in its appointed and appropriate place. In a word, we must first go to God *as sinners*, to obtain mercy through the blood of Christ; and then shall we *be made saints*, by the operation of the Spirit of Christ upon our souls.]

INFER—

1. How desirable is an interest in Christ Jesus!

[It is in Christ that all the promises are treasured up for us^o; and in Him alone are they ratified and confirmed to us^p. Unless as found in him, and united unto him by faith, we have no part in any one of them: but “all are ours, when we are Christ’s^q.” How earnest, then, should we be, in fleeing to him, that we may receive out of his fulness all the blessings both of grace and glory! I pray you, brethren, neglect him not; but seek him with your whole hearts, and cleave unto him with your whole souls.]

2. How truly blessed are they who are united to him by faith!

^m 2 Cor. vii. 1.

ⁿ Lev. xiv. 14, 28.

^o 2 Tim. i. 1.

^p 2 Cor. i. 20.

^q 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

[To them God has secured every thing, not by promise only, but by oath also! And this he has done in order that they might be assured of “the immutability of his counsel, and enjoy the richer consolation in their own souls^r.” Take the word of God, my dear brethren: cull out of it every promise it contains, and carry it to the throne of grace, and plead it before God; and verily you shall, in your dying hour, be able to say with Solomon, “Blessed be the Lord, who hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise which he promised by the hand of Moses,” or by all his prophets from the foundation of the world^s.]

^r Heb. vi. 18.

^s 1 Kings viii. 26.

MMCCCXIX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S GRACES.

2 Pet. i. 5—9. *Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.*

GREAT and unspeakable are the blessings vouchsafed to us by the Gospel: for in it “God hath given to us all things that pertain unto life and godliness;” and “through the exceeding great and precious promises contained in it, we are made partakers of a divine nature, and are enabled to escape the corruptions which are in the world through lust^a. Yet we are not to suppose that these blessings will flow down upon us without any effort on our part to obtain them. We must, if I may so speak, be “workers together with God:” or as my text expresses it, must “give all diligence to add” one grace to another, in order to our growing up into a perfect man.

Were we to enter minutely into every part of this exhortation, we should only distract your minds by

^a ver. 3, 4.

too great a diversity of matter. It will be more instructive and edifying to compress the subject, so as to preserve its unity, and to bring before you in one point of view what we conceive to be the mind of the Holy Ghost in this important passage. For this end we will commend to your attention,

I. The import of the exhortation—

Two things we see in it ;

1. What are the graces which we are called to exercise—

[It is here taken for granted that we have “faith;” for, in truth, we have no pretensions to call ourselves Christians till we have believed in Christ, and are united to him as branches of the living vine.

Assuming then that we are true believers, we must “add to our faith virtue.” By virtue we are not to understand that general assemblage of graces which in modern language is associated with that term; but courage, which is absolutely necessary to the Christian’s welfare. A man who will be faithful to his God, and walk worthy of his profession, will have much to contend with, both from without and from within: and, if he be not endued with fortitude, he will be in danger of yielding to discouragement, and turning back from his profession. Even the sneers of an ungodly world are not easy to bear: and thousands, through the fear of them, have made shipwreck of their faith. We must therefore be bold, if we would be “good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

“To our virtue we must add knowledge.” By “knowledge” I understand, not general information, but wisdom and prudence, without which our courage may lead us astray, and prove injurious to the cause which we profess to serve. We must seek “a spirit of power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*”^b. Among the children of Issachar, we are told, “there were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do”^c. Such should we be. The same conduct, if pursued at all times, and under all circumstances, would be very absurd: and perhaps scarcely in any thing does the adult Christian differ from the child more than in the exercise of “sound wisdom and discretion,” by which he is enabled to avoid the errors of the inexperienced^d, and to “walk wisely before God in a perfect way”^e.

To this must “temperance be added.” In this term also there is more implied than we generally annex to it. In this

^b 2 Tim. i. 7.

^c 1 Chron. xii. 32.

^d Prov. iii. 21—23.

^e Ps. ci. 2.

catalogue of graces it would appear a small thing to say, that we should abstain “from surfeiting and drunkenness;” (though that doubtless is necessary for Christians too^f.) We are, as has been before noted, in a state which calls for bold and judicious exertions: and as those who contended in the Grecian games were “temperate in all things,” in order that their bodily strength and agility might qualify them for their contests^g, so are we to be temperate, in order to ensure success in our spiritual conflicts. We should sit loose to all the things of time and sense, as well to those which are lawful as those which are unlawful! “using every thing so as not to abuse it^h,” and “keeping under all our bodily appetites, and bringing them into subjection, lest, after all our profession, we become reprobatesⁱ.”

“Patience” is another grace which must be added to all the former. And this too, like all the former, must be understood in somewhat of a larger sense, not merely as a meek submission to trials, but as a persevering effort to fulfil all the will of God. We are told, that “we have need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we may obtain the promise^k :” and it is only “by a patient continuance in well-doing, that we ever can obtain glory, and honour, and immortality^l.” This grace then must be added to all the rest. We must never be weary, either in doing, or in suffering, the will of God: but, as the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain; so must we “be patient, and establish our hearts, till the Lord himself shall come,” to crown, and to reward our labours^m.

We must not however rest here. “To patience we must add godliness:” for without a pious regard to God, all our efforts will be in vain. We may conceive of all the foregoing graces as exercised by a heathen: but we must have that sublime piety which no heathen can possess. We must see the hand of God in every thing; and receive every thing as from him; and do every thing as for him; making his will the rule, and his glory the end, of all our actions. At the same time, we must walk with him, and delight ourselves in him, and maintain sweet fellowship with him as our Father and our Friend, and must look for his approbation as our great reward.

To this there is yet another grace which we must add, and that is “brotherly-kindness,” We are all one family, and must regard every member of that family with a truly fraternal affection. It is “by this love one to another that all men are

^f Luke xxi. 34.

^g 1 Cor. ix. 25.

^h 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^k Heb. x. 36.

^l Rom. ii. 7.

^m Jam. v. 7, 8.

to know us for Christ's disciplesⁿ;" and by it we ourselves also are to judge of our having "passed from death unto life^o."

That which closes the train, and which must of necessity be added to all the rest, is "charity." For though there is an especial regard due to "the household of faith^p," our love must not be confined to them: it must be extended to all, even to enemies; and must so pervade our whole spirit and temper, and so regulate all our words and actions, as to evince that we are indeed children of Him, whose name and nature is "Love^q."]

2. The importance of them to the Christian character—

[No words can declare the importance of these graces to the Christian more forcibly than those in which the Apostle has declared it in my text: for he asserts, that *the constant exercise of them will prove us to be intelligent and consistent Christians, whilst the want of them will prove us ignorant and inconsistent.*

Attend to these assertions. "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you (that is, they *render*, or *constitute*^r you) neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." How shall it be known that any man possesses a truly scriptural and saving knowledge of Christ? It cannot be determined by his professions, but by the whole of his spirit and deportment. As a tree is known by its fruits, so is the faithful follower of Christ. If indeed these graces could flow from any other source than an union with the Lord Jesus, they would determine nothing respecting the reality of our faith in him: but they cannot. A man may have valour, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, without any acquaintance with the Lord Jesus: but the whole assemblage of graces that are here mentioned he cannot have: they can be wrought in the soul only by the Spirit of God: and the Spirit can be supplied by none but the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom is the residue of the Spirit^s," and "in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily^t:" and to none will Jesus so impart the Holy Spirit but to those who believe in him. Hence the existence and operation of these graces in the soul is a decisive evidence, that our faith in Christ is lively, our knowledge of him spiritual, and our walk before him consistent.

On the contrary, "he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off; and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." A speculative knowledge may be possessed

ⁿ John xiii. 35.

^o 1 John iii. 14.

^p Gal. vi. 10.

^q 1 John iv. 8, 16.

^r καθίστησιν.

^s Mal. ii. 15.

^t Col. i. 19. and ii. 9.

to a great extent, without any practical effect: but the circumstance of its being inoperative, clearly shews, that the person possessing it has no spiritual discernment. He is blind, or at best very dim-sighted, as to the excellency of the principles which he maintains: he sees not their proper tendency: he is unconscious of the worthlessness of mere notions, however just they may be, if separated from their practical effects: he betrays an utter ignorance of the nature of true religion: and he shews, that he has forgotten all the professions which he made, and the vows that he took upon him, when first he was baptized into the name of Christ. When by baptism he entered into covenant with God, he professed, that, as he expected the remission of sins through the blood of Christ, so he expected the mortification of sin by the Spirit of Christ. He engaged, that from that hour he would seek a conformity to Christ, “dying *unto* sin, as Christ died *for* sin, and rising again unto righteousness, even as Christ rose again to a new and heavenly life^u.” But by his want of all these graces, or his allowed deficiency in the exercise of them, he shews that he has forgotten all his former engagements, and is an ignorant and inconsistent professor, who disgraces that holy name by which he is called.

Now, I say, attend to these assertions of the Apostle, and judge whether the graces before-mentioned be not indispensably necessary to the Christian character, and whether we ought not to “give all diligence” to have the whole train of them exhibited in our lives.]

In further considering the Apostle’s exhortation, let us notice,

II. The insight which it gives us into pure and undefiled religion—

We should not be satisfied with viewing truth in abstract and detached parts: we should endeavour to acquire enlarged views of religion; to see it in all its bearings, and to get our minds duly impressed with its excellency and grandeur. In this we shall be greatly assisted by the Apostle’s exhortation; which, whilst with prismatic accuracy it brings before us the separate rays of which religion is composed, presents in their united power the full radiance of the Christian system.

See then in this passage the excellency of true religion:

1. How comprehensive it is in its nature!

^u Rom. vi. 3—6.

[There is not any situation in which we can be placed, wherein religion does not prescribe the path that shall be pursued; nor any variety of circumstances that can occur, in which it does not meet with a corresponding variety of limitations and exceptions. There is not an operation of the human mind which it does not undertake to regulate, and require to be under its exclusive controul. Perhaps we may fitly compare it with the office of the soul in our animal frame. Without the soul the body is dead. By its presence the human frame is animated throughout. The soul pervades, and operates in, every part. Not the smallest motion of the body is independent of it. Whatever faculties be called into exercise, they derive all their power and energy from it. It is altogether through its agency, that the eye sees, the ear hears, the hand moves. And these different powers are exercised with ease, because of the entire presence of the soul's energies in every part. Were there a single member, even the smallest in the human frame, that did not experience its power, it would be paralyzed, and the body, *as a whole*, would be deformed. Now thus it is that religion takes possession of the soul. Till that occupies the soul, the soul is dead: but when that descends into the soul, all our powers, whether of mind or body, are subjected to its controul. The influence of it being universal, its actings are easy, and without effort. If indeed there be an occasion that requires more than ordinary exertion, a suitable energy is put forth, just as in the human frame, when necessity requires.

Now what a view is this of religion! How grand, how glorious does it appear! Yet is this the view of it as set before us in the text, where every habit and disposition of the human mind is regulated by its requirements, and called forth into exercise by its vital energies. Such was St. Paul's view of it when he said, "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly! And I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ^x."

2. How connected in its parts!

[Which of the graces which the Apostle has enumerated in my text, can you dispense with? The whole forms a chain; of which, if one link be broken, the entire use is destroyed. Some indeed of these appear of less importance than others: but not only is every one of them necessary in its place, but every one must partake of the others that are connected with it, and can only operate with effect, when its exercise is so tempered. For instance; what would valour be without

^x 1 Thess. v. 23.

prudence? or prudence without temperance? or temperance without patience? or patience without godliness? or godliness without brotherly-kindness? or brotherly-kindness without charity? Take any one away, and the beauty and excellence of the whole will vanish altogether. St. Paul well illustrates this idea in his description of the Christian's armour. The sword, the shield, the helmet, the greaves, the breast-plate, and the girdle, are all necessary in their place^y: the loss of any one would be severely felt by the Christian combatant, and occasion his ultimate failure in his warfare. We must have "the whole armour," or none. So the want of any one of the graces specified in our text would suffice to ruin the soul for ever. Our Lord has told us this in the most express terms. He supposes that we may fall short only in some one particular point: and that for that failure we may have an excuse, which might appear sufficient to satisfy any candid mind. The particular evil which we know not how to part with may be dear to us as a right eye, or necessary to us as a right hand. Yet, if we submit not to pluck out the one, or amputate the other, our whole body shall be cast into hell, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched^z." In this the beauty of religion, as the beauty of the human frame, consists: only with this difference; that the body, though defective in its parts, may live; but the soul, if any one grace be wanting, is dead.

I pray you, brethren, consider this; and let the truth of it receive a daily illustration from your conduct. Never place religion in any *one* duty, or in any one *set* of duties; but let all the graces of the Spirit have their appropriate place, their seasonable attention, and their harmonious exercise.]

3. How lovely in its influence—

[Only conceive of any person living in the constant exercise of all these graces: how amiable, how godlike, I had almost said, would be his deportment! Then conceive of a whole family penetrated with this spirit, and what a picture of heaven would you behold! But conceive of religion filling, as assuredly it will one day fill, the whole earth, and every individual of mankind living in the unvaried exercise of these heavenly dispositions: well may such a state as this be called, as it is frequently in Scripture called, "The reign of Christ on earth." Blessed, blessed state! O that God would hasten it in his time! But if we be not privileged to behold that day, let us at least seek the commencement of that period in our own souls. Let us seek to resemble Christ as much as possible, and to "have the beauty of the Lord our God" beaming

^y Eph. vi. 13—17.

^z Mark ix. 42—48.

from our own face^a. This Moses had, by communing with God upon the holy mount; and this we also may have, if we will “*give all diligence*” to attain it. Rise then to the occasion: let your efforts be without intermission: cry mightily unto God for grace and strength: plead with him the promises which he has made to you in his Gospel; and “which in Christ Jesus are all yea, and amen.” So shall you be enabled to “cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^b.”]

^a Ps. xc. 17.

^b 2 Cor. vii. 1.

MMCCCCXX.

MAKING OUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE.

2 Pet. i. 10, 11. *Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

IN the system of religion which the inspired penmen have transmitted to us, duty and privilege go hand in hand. It is “the Divine power alone which gives us all things which pertain unto life and godliness:” but we must exert ourselves in dependence on that power, to “escape the corruption that is in the world through lust.” This plain and scriptural idea gives the true solution to many difficulties that occur in the sacred volume, and particularly so to those which arise from the words before us.

In the text are set before us,

I. Our duty—

Though all are agreed that our duty is here declared, the opinions of men differ widely respecting the precise nature of that duty. Our first point therefore is to fix the true meaning of the text—

[By our “calling and election,” is meant that *effectual* call which men receive when they are truly converted unto God^a, and which both *evinces*, and *results from*, God’s eternal purpose to save their souls^b.

^a This is manifest from 1 Cor. i. 26.

^b 1 Thess. i. 4, 5.

Now those who deny the doctrine of election, argue thus. We are commanded to “make our election sure;” and, if we neglect to do so, we may “fall” and perish for ever: *therefore* there is no such thing as is generally understood by “election;” and that which is so called in Scripture, is nothing more than a designation of God to the enjoyment of outward privileges, or an acceptance of us upon certain conditions.

To avoid these consequences, many who hold the doctrine of election affirm, that the exhortation in the text means only that we should exert ourselves to get an *assured sense* of our election.

But there is no such ambiguity in the original, as there is in our translation. Whatever the text may prove or disprove, it can have but one meaning; namely, that we are to make our election *firm*, and, by diligence in good works, to *secure* the benefits to which God has elected us.

This however does not disprove the doctrine of election. The truth is, that God elects us to holiness *as the means*, as well as to glory *as the end*^c: He elects us *to the end by the means*^d; so that the end can never be secured but by the means prescribed. Though therefore God does elect us unto salvation, we can never partake of that salvation, if we be not found in a diligent discharge of all our duties, and the constant exercise of all moral virtues^e. Hence St. Paul, notwithstanding he was assured of his final enjoyment of heaven^f, was careful to “keep his body under and bring it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^g;” and hence we also are commanded to “look to ourselves, lest we lose the things we have already wrought, and so come short of our full reward^h.” The truth lies, not in a simple affirming or denying of the doctrine of election, but in connecting the means with the end, as *the joint objects which God, in his eternal purpose, has determined to accomplish.*]

The meaning of the text being ascertained, the duty contained in it is clear—

[There is a connexion between all the graces of the Spirit: they are so many links in a chain, no one of which can be dispensed with. If we have faith, we must add to it “*valour*,” that shall encounter difficulties; “*knowledge*,” that shall regulate the whole of our deportment; “*temperance*,” that shall make us indifferent to the pleasures of sense; “*patience*,” that shall carry us through all hardships; “*godliness*,” that shall

^c Eph. i. 4.

^d 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

^e Rom. ii. 7.

^f 2 Cor. v. 1.

^g 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^h 2 John, ver. 8. and Heb. iv. 1.

fill us with a delight in heavenly things; “brotherly-kindness,” that shall knit us to every member of Christ’s mystical body; and “charity,” that shall engage us in all offices of love even to our very enemies. All of these graces we should cultivate; and, having attained any measure of them, we should seek to grow in them daily; resting in no attainment “till we come to the measure of the full stature of Christⁱ.”

In labouring after these things, we shall “make our calling and election sure:” we shall not only *prove* that we have been elected of God, and called by his grace, but shall “strengthen the things that remain,” and “*make firm*” the work that has been begun in our souls. Indeed the very pursuit of virtue must in itself tend (in proportion as we are diligent) to keep us from declension^k: and it is certain, that God will prosper those who conscientiously labour to approve themselves to him^l.]

Here then is our duty, viz. *to secure by unwearied diligence in good works the final enjoyment of those blessings to which God has elected us by his grace, and called us by his good Spirit.* And, to aid us in the discharge of this duty, the Apostle sets promises before us for,

II. Our encouragement—

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” But more particularly God engages to give his diligent and devoted people,

1. A steadfast life: “If ye do these things, *ye shall never fall*”—

[It too often happens that professors of religion are left to dishonour their holy calling by open and scandalous offences: nor have any of us any security against such falls, except as we are upheld in God’s everlasting arms. But this security shall be afforded to the zealous and faithful follower of Christ. My text says, “*If ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*” The diligent Christian doubtless will, even to his dying hour, have reason to acknowledge, that he is a poor imperfect creature: but he shall be kept from flagrant transgressions; and shall, *in respect of them*, “be preserved blameless unto God’s heavenly kingdom.” Numberless are the promises of God to this effect^m — — — And O, what encouragement do

ⁱ ver. 5—7.

^k Prov. iii. 21—23.

^l 2 Chron. xv. 2.

^m 1 Sam. ii. 9. Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24.

they afford to those who know their weakness and their frailty! Surely the hope of being enabled to “do all things through the strength of Christ,” and of being made “more than conquerors through him that loved us, and of having “our strength in all respects proportioned to our day of trial,” may well stimulate us to exertion, and make us diligent in performing every thing which God requireth at our handsⁿ.]

2. A triumphant death—

[A variety of things may occur to affect the mind of a dying saint, and to prevent him from displaying the full efficacy of his principles in his last hours: but, in the general, the peacefulness of his departure will be proportioned to the integrity and diligence of his life. Indeed, it may be expected by those who “abound in every good word and work,” that God will be peculiarly present with them in the time of their greatest need^o: they may hope to be favoured with Pisgah-views of the heavenly Canaan, and, like Stephen, to behold their Saviour standing ready to receive them. Such was Paul’s departure, after a life of unremitting exertion in his Master’s cause^p: and such “an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord shall be ministered to us” also, if we follow the steps of that distinguished Apostle.

Who that has ever seen the insensibility of some, or the terrors of others, would not wish to have this promise fulfilled to him in a dying hour? — — — Let us then live the life of the righteous, if we would die his death. Let us look to it, that we be daily ripening for glory: then shall we in due time be carried to it, “like a shock of corn” to the garner.]

APPLICATION—

You will naturally ask me, what directions I would give you for the attainment of this great object? I answer,

1. Let there be in you no allowed sin—

[The wisdom that is from above, is “without partiality and without hypocrisy^q.” One leak will sink a ship; and one allowed sin will destroy the soul^r. If ever you would be saved at last, you must be “Israelites indeed, and without guile^s.” Faith in Christ must be laid as the foundation; but every Christian grace must compose the edifice that is built upon it.]

2. Cry mightily to God to perfect and complete his work within you—

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^o Ps. lxxiii. 26.

^p 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

^q Jam. iii. 17.

^r Matt. xviii. 8, 9.

^s John i. 47.

[He who has been “the Author of your faith must also be the Finisher^t.” “Be strong only in the Lord, and in the power of his might^u.” Commit your soul into the Saviour’s hands, and entreat him to “keep you from falling^x :” so shall you “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^y,” and “be kept by the power of God through faith unto everlasting salvation^z”]

^t Heb. xii. 2.

^u Eph. vi. 10.

^x Jude, ver. 24.

^y Col. iv. 12.

^z 1 Pet. i. 5.

MMCCCCXXI.

A PASTORAL ADMONITION.

2 Pet. i. 12—15. *Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.*

IN every period of the world, the servants of God, at the close of life, have laboured with more than ordinary assiduity to impress on the minds of their people the truths, which, from the commencement of their ministry, they have inculcated. When Moses had brought the Israelites to the very borders of Canaan, he was ordered to “write a song, and to teach it to the children of Israel, that to the latest period of time it might be a witness against them for the Lord,” in the event of their turning from him to serve other gods^a. Joshua, in like manner, at the close of his life, called for all Israel, and charged them to “fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth;” and, on their engaging so to do, he said, “Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him^b.” St. Paul also, how affectionately did he warn the elders of Ephesus, who had come to take their leave of him at Miletus^c!

^a Deut. xxxi. 19, 29, 30. and xxxii. 1—43.

^b Josh. xxiii. 2. and xxiv. 14, 21, 22.

^c Acts xx. 17, 28.

Thus does the Apostle Peter, in this his second epistle to the Jewish converts dispersed throughout the world, endeavour to “stir them up,” by calling to their remembrance the truths he had inculcated, that so they might, after his removal from them, retain their steadfastness even to the end^d.

In conformity with these examples, I would, after ministering to you for half a century, point out^e,

First, what, in conformity with St. Peter’s example, I have, from the beginning, laboured to instil into your minds.

I might here, in the review of my whole ministerial life, adopt the words which St. Paul used at the close of his career: “Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people (the Jewish people) and to the Gentiles^f.” Yes, I can appeal to all who have ever known me, that to proclaim a suffering and triumphant Messiah, as revealed to us by Moses and the prophets, has been the one object of my life, without any variation as arising from the persons addressed, “whether small or great,” and without ever turning aside after novelties, or fond conceits, or matters of doubtful disputation. From the beginning, “I determined,” like that blessed Apostle, “to know nothing amongst you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

But I will draw your attention rather to St. Peter’s conduct, and to his expressions as contained in the foregoing context. He says, “I will endeavour that you may be able, after my decease, to have *these things* always in remembrance.”

What “*these things*” were which he here refers to, I will endeavour to explain. He addresses himself

^d 2 Pet. iii. 17. with the text.

^e This was a *Jubilee* Sermon, preached on that special occasion.

^f Acts xxvi. 22, 23.

to those who had obtained like precious faith with him, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:" and he calls upon them to "add to their faith, virtue," and a whole series of other graces suited to the Christian character^g. *These* were the things which their profession of Christianity indispensably required, and which alone could justify any pretensions to the knowledge of Christ, or give them a hope of acceptance in the eternal world^h.

Now, my brethren, these are the things which I also, according to the grace given to me, have inculcated, from the first moment that I came amongst you. And these are the things which I am anxious that "you should bear always in remembrance after my decease." I am aware that you, my stated hearers, both "know these things, and are, for the most part, established in the truths that have been set before you." But I know also what danger there is of your forgetting them, when he, who has so long declared them unto you, is removed to a better world. You cannot but recollect, that the whole people of Israel, within the short space of forty days after that Moses had absented himself from them, turned away from Jehovah to worship the golden calfⁱ: and that "King Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, no longer than whilst he was under the eye, and the instruction, of Jehoiada the priest^k." What then can I expect, but that many of you will "let slip the things which you have heard^l," and "turn aside from the holy commandments delivered to you^m?" Excuse me, therefore, if I lay hold on this present opportunity to bring to your remembrance what you have so often heard delivered to you with all plainness and fidelity.

If it be asked *why* Peter adopted this course towards his Jewish converts, and *why* I endeavour to follow his example, I will proceed to shew you,

^g ver. 1, 5.

^h ver. 8, 9.

ⁱ Deut. ix. 11, 12.

^k 2 Chron. xxiv. 2.

^l Heb. ii. 1.

^m 2 Pet. ii. 21.

Secondly, Why he was, as I myself also am, anxious that you should “have these things always in remembrance.”

Amongst the numberless reasons that might be assigned, I shall content myself with stating the three following:—

First, I would impress these things on your minds, because *on your remembrance of them depends the everlasting welfare of your souls.*

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of all your hopes. You all know that you are sinners, and that, as sinners, you are under a sentence of condemnation. And how shall that sentence be reversed? Need you be told, that you can never, by any works of your own, purchase the remission of your sins? You know you cannot. You know, that even your best actions are very imperfect, and incapable of claiming for you any recompence, if tried by the test of God’s holy law: so that *for them*, no less than for any fouler transgressions, you need forgiveness at the hands of God. Hence, I trust, you are ready to say with St. Paul, “I desire to be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faithⁿ.”

At the same time, you know the necessity of universal holiness in order to prove and attest the sincerity of your faith. I bless God, there is not amongst you all, so far as I know, even one single individual, that leans to Antinomian licentiousness, or that has any conceit that his faith can avail for his salvation, unless it “work by love^o,” and “purify the heart^p.”

Yes, I am happy to say, that “ye know these things, and are, for the most part, established in them.” But is there no danger of your declining from them, when the tongue that now inculcates them shall be silent in the grave? Even in the

ⁿ Phil. iii. 9.

^o Gal. v. 6.

^p Acts xv. 9.

midst of all endeavours to keep you in the “good old way,” have you never seen any “turned from the simplicity that is in Christ^a?” Alas! alas! even in the apostolic Churches such declensions were common: we must not wonder, therefore, if, amongst ourselves, some be drawn aside by Satan^r, to “make shipwreck of their faith, and of a good conscience^s.” But what must be the result of such instability? The Apostle tells us, that “if any man draw back, my soul,” says God, “shall have no pleasure in him.” Yes, beyond a possibility of doubt, every such person, whoever he be, and whatever he may imagine, “draws back unto perdition^t;” and his last end is worse than his beginning^u.”

And shall it be thus with any of you, my brethren? God forbid. I tremble at the thought of it, and will endeavour, as far as in me lies, to prevent so awful an issue to my present ministrations. Let me tell you again and again, (for “to speak the same things to you, to me is not grievous, but for you it is safe^x;)” let me tell you, I say, that “there is no other foundation for any sinner in the universe to build upon, but that which God himself has laid in Zion, which is Jesus Christ^y.” And let me further declare, that “it is not a dead faith that shall save you, but one which is productive of good works^z;” and that “without holiness, real, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord^a.”

Next, the Apostle laboured to impress these things on their minds, because he knew that *his opportunities for reminding them of them were coming to an end.*

The Lord Jesus Christ had told him many years before, that, when he should be old, he should be bound, and crucified by his enemies^b. And the time for this catastrophe was now near at hand: yet with such sweet composure did the Apostle contemplate this tremendous death, that he spake of it only as

^a 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^r 1 Tim. v. 15.

^s 1 Tim. i. 19.

^t Heb. x. 38, 39.

^u 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^x Phil. iii. 1.

^y 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^z Jam. ii. 14, 20, 26.

^a Heb. xii. 14.

^b John xxi. 18, 19.

the taking down of a tent or tabernacle, to rear it again in a better place: but, as it would put a termination to his earthly career, he was anxious to improve his few remaining hours in fixing these things upon their minds, in order “that they might have them in remembrance after his decease.” And though I have no reason to expect *such* an end, yet it cannot now be long before I must be called to “put off this my tabernacle,” and to cease from the work in which I have been engaged these fifty years. I do indeed bless God, that I have one to succeed me *in part* who shall carry on the work to far greater advantage than I have ever been able to do: but yet, who shall occupy the more ostensible post of your stated minister, God alone knows; and whether he shall maintain amongst you the same doctrine of justification by faith, and hold up before you the same high standard of practical piety, none but God can tell: but this I know, that no doctrine but that of a crucified Saviour, can ever avail for your salvation; and that no measure of holiness, less than that of an entire devotedness of heart and life to God, can ever justify a hope of an interest in Christ. And, whether all this be inculcated on you or not, who can tell whether you shall retain the experience of it in your souls? I look at the Seven Churches of Asia, and see how they were fallen, even whilst the Apostle John yet remained to instruct and warn them. And in what state are they now? Or see, if you will, places in our own land, where once a faithful ministry was established, and to what a state are they now reduced! A Sibbs^c, and a Preston^d, once ministered in this place; but how little of their mind and spirit was transmitted to later generations, the records of this parish even in my own time, most fully testify. Whilst then God is pleased to continue me amongst you, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present

^c The Master of Catharine Hall, in 1626.

^d The Master of Emmanuel, in 1622.

truth." As long as I am able to bear any testimony amongst you, I will still declare, that Jesus, our adorable Lord, is the only Saviour of sinners; and that as his atoning blood alone can ever cleanse you from the guilt of sin, so his blessed Spirit alone can ever renovate you after the Divine image, or make you "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Receive ye this, my brethren, as by anticipation, my dying testimony. Treasure it up in your minds, that, "after my decease, you may have it always in remembrance." It is a comfort to me to think, that "long after I am dead," I shall, by my printed works, "yet speak to you;" and, though I cannot hope that they should occupy the attention of persons situated as you are, they will exist as records of the doctrines delivered to you, and amongst them, this, as my dying address, will find a place, as a memorial of my love to you, and of my desire for your eternal welfare.

One more reason for St. Peter's so insisting upon these things was, that *he could not otherwise discharge his duty towards those whom he had been commissioned to instruct*. He says, "I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance." His expression here is remarkable: The word "meet," would be properly translated "*just*:" "He thought it *just*^e to do this: he considered, that, to be remiss in the discharge of this duty, would be *an act of injustice; an injustice to them; an injustice to God; an injustice to himself*. In this light I also consider it, my beloved brethren. If I should not press upon your minds the knowledge of Christ, and the necessity of universal holiness, it would be an act of injustice *to you*. You have been committed to me by Almighty God, as sheep to a shepherd, that I might watch over you, and lead you into the pastures which God has provided for you; and rather lay down my life for you, than suffer you to fall a prey to that "roaring lion that seeketh to devour you." It would also be an act of injustice *towards God*,

^e δίκαιον.

who is the great Proprietor of the fold, and who will “require at my hands the blood of every one amongst you that has perished through my neglect^f.” Alas! What account shall I give to him when he shall summon me to his tribunal, and inquire into my discharge of my pastoral office? ‘Did I not send you to watch over them? Did I not appoint you a “steward of those great mysteries^g” which I had revealed in my word, the mysteries of redeeming love? Did you not undertake to make known to them all that my dear Son had done and suffered for them? Did you not engage to declare all that my Holy Spirit was empowered to work within them, by transforming them into my perfect image? Why then did you accept the office of an ambassador from me, if you did not intend to discharge it with fidelity? Why did you suffer so much as one single “soul for whom Christ died, to perish” through your neglect^h? Was it for *this* that I intrusted you with *so high a commission*, and put *my interests* into your hands, that you should be so remiss in the discharge of *the one*, and so careless in the advancement of *the other*?’ I may add also, it would be an act of injustice *to myself*. I know that “your blood will be required at my hands:” and I engaged at my ordination to “watch over you as one that must give account” to the Judge of quick and deadⁱ. How then shall I appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, if I neglect to “declare unto you the whole counsel of God?” What shall I say when that question shall be put to me, “Where are those sheep which I committed to thee in the wilderness?” My dear brethren, if I have no concern but about my own soul, I must fulfil the ministry committed to me, and labour, whilst yet any remnant of power is continued to me, to stir up in your minds a love to that Saviour who has died for you, and to bring you to that conformity to his image, which can alone fit you for the enjoyment of his presence and glory.

^f Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.

^h 1 Cor. viii. 11.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 1.

ⁱ Heb. xiii. 17.

But now, in the *third* place, what shall I say in order to effect my purpose? What considerations shall I urge upon you in order the more effectually to impress your minds with the truths which I have before stated? I will adopt the line of argument suggested by the Apostle himself in the preceding context.

An adherence to these things is *what you engaged for in your baptismal covenant*. Then Christ was received by you as your Lord and Saviour: and you professed to look for remission of sins altogether in his name, and through faith in his blood and righteousness. At the same time you gave up yourselves to him to be sanctified in body, soul, and spirit by his grace, and to live altogether to his glory. But, if you recede in any respect from these engagements, you abandon all the hopes which were then held out to you by that covenant of being “purged from your sins^k,” and you forfeit that remission, which, if you received your baptism aright, or subsequently realized the engagements then entered into, was then conceded to you. And are you willing to cast off thus your Christian profession, and to sacrifice your interest in those “great and precious promises” which were then tendered to you in the Saviour’s name, and “by which you might have been made partakers of the Divine nature^l,” and heirs of the Divine glory? Think, I pray you, of the loss you will sustain, and the tremendous responsibility that will attach to you: and beg of God, that he will never leave you thus, nor suffer you to “receive all this grace in vain^m.”

Further let me say, These are the things *on which your perseverance in the divine life entirely dependsⁿ*. A simple life of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ is to you what the union of a branch is to its parent stock. If from adopting any notions whatever your communion with him is interrupted, nothing but decay and death can ensue. So likewise, if there be any one grace which you do not cultivate, the neglect of that will open the door to numberless

^k ver. 9.

^l ver. 4.

^m 2 Cor. vi. 1.

ⁿ ver. 10.

other evils, and you will be “left to fall” and perish. It matters not what that virtue is which you neglect: if “intemperance,” or “impatience,” or “uncharitableness,” or “ungodliness” of any kind^o be suffered to retain an ascendant over you, it will, as water in a leaky ship, in a little time fully occupy your soul, and finally sink you to perdition. “A right hand or a right eye,” however necessary it may appear to your present happiness, will, if retained, “destroy both body and soul in hell^p.” The union of faith and holiness must be complete and abiding, even as the root of the tree with the fruit: both, in their place, are necessary to “make your calling and election sure:” and, if either fail, you will inevitably and eternally perish.

Once more—It is by bearing these things in remembrance that you *will ensure to yourselves a happy dismissal from the body at the hour of death, and an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^q*.” As to any thing of exalted joy in the hour of death, I do not see much of that in the death of the Scripture-saints, nor do I think that, as a general occurrence, we are authorized to expect it. But *peace* in a dying hour we may expect: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is *peace*^r.” But how is this to be secured? It is by cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ with full purpose of heart, and by endeavouring to glorify him by a holy life and conversation. An entire reliance on him is necessary. Nothing but a view of his all-atoning sacrifice can satisfy the mind in a dying hour. We may now run after notions that are mooted and propagated in the Christian world: but they will afford us little comfort when we are about to enter into the presence of our Judge, and to receive at his hands our eternal doom. Nothing, I say, but a view of Christ as the appointed Saviour of the world, will give us boldness at that day. But, if now we “live entirely by faith

^o ver. 6, 7.

^p Mark ix. 43—48.

^q ver. 11.

^r Ps. xxxvii. 37.

on him, as having loved us and given himself for us^s," we shall be able then to commit our souls into his hands with an assured hope of acceptance, and a blessed prospect of dwelling with him for ever. At the same time, however, we must have the testimony of our conscience, that, amidst all our infirmities, we did not retain any allowed iniquity, but did endeavour to walk "as he walked," and to "purify ourselves even as he was pure." If in relation to this matter "our heart condemn us not, then shall we have confidence toward God^t."

Now consider, my dear brethren, how desirable this blessing is. To have misgiving fears in the hour of death will be very terrible: but to possess a sweet assured confidence that we are accepted of our God, and to have "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour," like that of a ship, with wind and tide in its favour, into its destined port, what felicity will that be! And how greatly is it to be desired! Would you then possess this blessing, keep in remembrance the things which I have preached to you; and get your minds so fully and continually occupied with them, that, after my decease, as well as during my few remaining hours, they may have their full influence upon you; and that, when we shall meet around the throne of God, I may have you as "my joy and crown of rejoicing to all eternity^u."

^s Gal. ii. 20.

^t 1 John iii. 21.

^u 1 Thess. ii. 19.

MMCCCCXXII.

THE TRUTH AND CERTAINTY OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Pet. i. 16. *We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

AMONGST the various proofs which we have of the truth and certainty of our holy religion, one of great importance is, that amongst all the authors and founders of it no diversity of sentiment obtained upon any essential point of doctrine; whether the

teachers of it were learned (like the Evangelist Luke and the Apostle Paul), or unlearned (like the rest of the Apostles), they were all of one mind: nor during the whole apostolic age was there so much as one controversy among them, if we except the doubt that was raised about imposing the yoke of the Mosaic law upon the Gentiles: nor was this question moved by the teachers themselves, but only referred to them by some who were less instructed amongst their converts. This shews, that they were all taught by one and the same Spirit: for it is not to be conceived, that amongst so great a variety of persons, so differently situated, and so differently gifted, there should not have been a considerable diversity of sentiment, sufficient to distract the minds of their hearers, and to cause divisions in the Church. Moreover, we never find one of the inspired Apostles speaking with doubt upon any fundamental point: they knew infallibly, and declared without hesitation, that we are all guilty and helpless in ourselves, all redeemed by the blood of Christ, all renewed by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and all to be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. We cannot but be struck with the confidence with which the Apostle Peter speaks in the words before us, and with the simplicity with which that confidence is expressed.

That I may place his words in a just point of view, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What he had declared respecting Christ—

The generality of commentators confine “the power and coming” of the Lord Jesus Christ to his future advent to judge the world. But I see no reason for so limiting them: I see nothing in the context that should lead us to such a contracted view of them. I conceive that they include what Christ has done, as well as what he will do; and that the Apostle refers to,

1. The power with which Christ *has* come—

Both the epistles of Peter are catholic, addressed to the whole Church. In the former especially he speaks very fully, and forcibly, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the different ends and purposes of his advent. He declares him to have been “fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but manifest in these last times for his people^a.” He specifies the end of his manifestation, which was, to “redeem his people by his blood,” and to bear their sins in his own body on the tree^b. He declares him to have been “raised up from the dead by the Father; that our faith and hope might be in God^c :” and he states, that by his “resurrection from the dead he hath begotten us again to a lively hope of an incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading inheritance^d.” He represents him further as “the foundation-stone upon which all his Church and people are built,” and which will infallibly support them all for ever and ever^e. And, lastly, he speaks of him as gone into heaven as our forerunner, and as “reigning there above all the principalities and powers” of heaven, earth, and hell^f.

In the epistle that is before us too, he had spoken fully to the same effect, declaring that “grace and peace were to be multiplied unto us through the knowledge of this Saviour^g,” who is the one source and fountain of all good, and has “by his divine power given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness^h.”

Now these things Peter had declared: and they are no other than what every minister of Christ must declare. His ordination to his office from all eternity, his execution of it in time for the salvation of a ruined world, his exaltation to glory, from whence he communicates all blessings to his people, and overrules every thing for their eternal good, this must be made known by every minister of Christ, and must be received by every child of man.]

2. The power with which he *will* come—

[At a future period, that same Jesus, who was crucified, shall appear again “in power and great gloryⁱ,” and will come to “judge both the quick and dead^k.” Then shall “his glory be fully revealed^l ;” and his kingdom be established for ever in the heaven of heavens^m.

These things also the Apostle affirmed. And what less could be declared by any one that has undertaken to preach the Gospel?

^a 1 Pet. i. 20.

^b 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. and ii. 24.

^c 1 Pet. i. 21.

^d 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 5, 6.

^f 1 Pet. iii. 22.

^g ver. 2.

^h ver. 3.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 7.

^k 1 Pet. iv. 5

^l 1 Pet. iv. 13.

^m ver. 11.

If they appear to any to be a cunningly-devised fable, I ask, Why do they appear so? The only answer that can be given is this; That these things are *too great* to be comprehended by us, and *too good* to be expected or believed. They are *great*, no doubt; and they are *good* also, beyond all that any finite intelligence could have conceived. But they are not *on that account* to be questioned. The *creation* of the world out of nothing, as far exceeds our conceptions as the *redemption* of it. Both the one and the other are the offspring of infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness: and, if we were not compelled by the evidence of our senses to acknowledge the wonders of creation, we should be as ready to deny the possibility of them, as we are to question the wonders of redemption. But the Apostle declares, that even these latter had, as far as they could be, been made objects of sense; and every evidence of them that could be submitted to the senses had been given to him.]

In confirmation of this the Apostle proceeds to state,

II. On what assured grounds he was enabled to bear his testimony respecting him—

The Apostle had all the evidence respecting the Messiahship of Jesus that was possessed by the Church at large. He had beheld all the miracles that Jesus wrought, and heard all his discourses, and seen his bright example, and witnessed his resurrection and ascension, and had received from him the Holy Ghost according to his promise on the day of Pentecost; and had beheld also the triumphs of the Gospel over all the power and policy of earth and hell. (Of the prophecies which he had seen fulfilled in him, we shall have occasion to speak hereafter.) But in addition to all these, he himself possessed an evidence which had made the deepest impression on his own mind, an evidence, which no other human being, except James and John, was ever permitted to behold, and which he could not forbear to adduce on this occasion in confirmation of all that he had statedⁿ.

He had received the evidence of his senses respecting the power and coming of the Lord Jesus—

ⁿ ver. 17, 18.

[He with James and John had been taken up to Mount Tabor by his Divine Master, who had there been transfigured before them^o. On that occasion the bright effulgence of the Deity had been made to shine forth in the person of the Lord Jesus, whose "face was as bright as the meridian sun, and whose raiment was as white as the light," whiter far than any fuller on earth could make them^p." This bright effulgence Peter had seen with his bodily eyes.

On that occasion too Moses had been raised from the dead, and Elijah brought down from heaven, to bear their testimony to him. These two persons represented the law and the prophets, both of which had their full accomplishment in him: and they now, as it were, surrendered up their respective offices to him, who was henceforth to be the great Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church and people. Of this also Peter had been "an eye witness."

But, in addition to this, God the Father had borne witness to his Son by an audible voice from heaven, saying, "This is that my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: Hear ye him^q." In these words there was a direct reference to what God had before said to Moses, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto thee: him shall ye hear: and whosoever will not hear that prophet, I will require it of him^r." This voice declared, that that very Jesus was the prophet so referred to, and the prophet whom all must obey at the peril of their souls. And this voice Peter distinctly heard.]

This evidence fully confirmed all that he had asserted respecting Christ—

[He had declared that Jesus Christ was the only-begotten Son of God, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person^s," and of this, as far as it was possible, he had been an eye, and ear witness. He had declared the sufficiency of his death for the redemption of the whole world: and how could he doubt this when God had audibly proclaimed his acquiescence in it in that view? He had declared, that the salvation or condemnation of every living man would depend on his acceptance or rejection of this Saviour, who was the one Prophet, whom all must hear; the one Priest, in whom all must trust: and the one King, whom all must obey: and so strongly were these truths assured to him by all that he had seen and heard, that he could not doubt of them one moment, or hesitate to appeal to them, in proof that "he had not

^o Matt. xvii. 1—5.

^p Mark ix. 3.

^q This is the force of the article in Matt. xvii. 5.

^r Deut. xviii. 18, 19.

^s Heb. i. 3.

followed any cunningly-devised fable," as ignorant Gentiles, or superstitious Jews, were wont to do. And to these things do *we* also make *our* appeal: for in these things the three Apostles could not be deceived: and their whole life and death shewed clearly enough, that they had no design or wish to deceive.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let not any of you then be moved by the impious and blasphemous attempts which are made to undermine the Gospel—

[You may see in my text the construction which infidels and blasphemers are wont to put upon the truths of revelation: they pour contempt upon them as "cunningly-devised fables," invented and propagated by designing priests for the advancement of their own interests. But who could ever disprove the truth and authority either of the Old or New Testament? It is easy enough to sneer and cavil at any thing: and impious scoffers ever have treated in this way the truths of revelation, even from the days of Jannes and Jambres, who withstood Moses^t, to the present hour^u." "Men of corrupt minds, and reprobate concerning the truth," ever have, and ever will, "sport in this manner with their own deceivings^x." But, beloved, search the Scriptures for yourselves: examine the evidences which have been adduced in proof of their divine authority: see the suitability of the provision which has been made for you by Almighty God in the person and work of his only-begotten Son: and you will soon see, that the great mystery of redemption carries its own evidence along with it, and that what is spoken in Scripture respecting it, is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance" — — —]

2. Let all of you get an experimental acquaintance with the Gospel in your own souls—

[Peter believed the evidences which he had in common with others: but he felt peculiar conviction from those which he derived from his own personal experience. So the people of Samaria, who had believed on Jesus on account of the woman's testimony, told her afterwards, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world^y." Thus do you seek, if not the evidences of *your senses*, yet the

^t 2 Tim. iii. 8.

^u February, 1820, just after the trial and condemnation of Carlile, for re-publishing a blasphemous and seditious libel—Paine's "Age of Reason."

^x Compare 2 Tim. iii. 8. with 2 Pet. ii. 10—13. and iii. 3, 4.

^y John iv. 42.

evidence of *your own experience*; for it is certain, that “he who truly believeth in Christ, *hath the witness in himself*”^z: he knows the power and grace of Christ in a way that he never could know it from mere argument: and in speaking of Christ he can say, “What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, my hands have handled of the word of life, that declare I unto you^a.” There are “spiritual senses which may be exercised;” and though their testimony is not satisfactory to others, it is peculiarly convincing to those who possess it. For the good of others then I say, Seek an acquaintance with the established evidences of the Gospel: but for your own good I say, Go up to Jesus upon the holy mount, and there hear and see what God will reveal for the conviction and consolation of your souls. So shall you have an evidence which nothing can shake, and feel yourselves standing on a rock, which defies the assaults both of earth and hell.]

^z 1 John v. 10.

^a 1 John i. 1.

MMCCCCXXIII.

THE TESTIMONY OF PROPHECY.

2 Pet. i. 19. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.*

THAT persons ignorant of the grounds on which Christianity is established should doubt the truth of it, ought not to occasion us any surprise: for it must be confessed, that on a superficial view of the leading points contained in it, it does appear to surpass the bounds of credibility. That the God of heaven and earth should assume our nature, and be made in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he should thus humble himself, in order that he might in his own person bear, and expiate, the sins of his rebellious creatures; that, having wrought out in our nature a perfect righteousness, he should offer that righteousness to all who will believe in him, and accept it in their behalf for the justification of their souls before him; there is in all this something so wonderful, so glorious, so delightful, that it does indeed appear like “a cunningly-devised fable;” and one is tempted to say concerning

it, as Job did under a similar impression of the manifold grace of God, "If I had called to God, and he had answered me (and told me by an audible voice from heaven that Christianity was true), yet would I not believe that he hearkened to my voice^a." As Peter, when actually liberated from prison, "wist not that it was true, but thought he saw a vision," so, when we have the actual experience of the Gospel salvation in our own souls, it actually seems at times to be "a dream^b." But it is no dream, no cunningly-devised fable; but a glorious reality. Of this the Apostle was well assured. He had received the most positive evidence of it from his own senses. He had seen his Lord transfigured upon the holy mount: and had heard the testimony which the Father had borne to him by an audible voice from heaven; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased^c." But, however satisfactory this evidence was to him, it could not be so convincing to others, because it depended solely on the testimony of himself and the other two Apostles who were admitted to that sight, and because the inferences which he drew from what he had seen and heard would not commend themselves with the same force to others as they did to him. But there were other grounds on which all might feel the same assurance as he himself did. There was "a more sure word of prophecy," which every one might examine for himself, and of which every one who did examine it was competent to judge. This no man could weigh without being convinced by it: he might as well doubt his own existence, as doubt the truth of Christianity, if only he examined the prophecies with a candid mind.

It is my intention to shew you,

I. The evidence of our religion as founded on prophecy—

Verily it is "a sure word," that may well be

^a Job ix. 16.

^b Ps. cxxvi. 1.

^c ver. 16—18.

depended on. Consider the vast collective body of prophecies : consider,

1. Their fulness—

[There is not any one point relating to Christianity that has not been the subject of prophecy. Every thing relating to Christ, his person, his work, his offices; his life, his death, his resurrection and ascension; his investiture with all power at the right hand of God; the nature, extent, and duration of his kingdom; and his second coming to judge the world; all has been fully and distinctly declared by holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Now I ask, Would any one have ventured to predict so many things respecting an impostor? Supposing that the dangerous ground of prophecy had been taken by any who conspired to deceive the world, would they not for their own sake have been satisfied with a few general predictions, that were capable of different interpretations, and that were likely in the common course of events to happen? Would any persons have undertaken to give beforehand so full, so large, so complicated a disclosure of all that should come to pass? But add to this,]

2. Their minuteness—

[It is surprising that prophecy should condescend to such minute occurrences as were actually foretold concerning Christ. Not only were the time and place of his nativity foretold, but his expulsion from thence to Egypt, and his subsequent abode at Nazareth. So again, not only was the manner of his death declared, but such minute circumstances as could not be conceived; such as the very words which his enemies should taunt him with, whilst yet he should hang upon the cross; and their offering him vinegar to drink; and even the manner in which they should dispose of his raiment, casting lots for one part, whilst they divided the rest. Now I ask, Could any but the omniscient God predict such things as these? things, which could not be fulfilled by any except by the very enemies who put him to death as an impostor?

But the evidence, as arising from the fulness and minuteness of the prophecies, will derive great strength from marking,]

3. Their consistency—

[Certainly, when we consider that the prophecies were delivered by different persons wholly unconnected with each other, at distant times and places, during the space of three thousand six hundred years, and that the things which they predicted were in appearance so opposite to each other; it is inconceivable, that no inconsistency should be found in any of them, if they were not inspired by the omniscient and unchangeable God.

Let us enter a little into this point.—*The person* of the Messiah. He must be “Jehovah’s fellow,” “the mighty God,” and yet “a man,” yea “a worm, and no man, the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people.” He must be “the Root and yet the Offspring of David,” “David’s Son, and yet David’s Lord.” He must be “a Lion,” and yet “a Lamb.” He must be a King, a Priest, and a Prophet, all in one. He must die, yet live. Though a Jew, he must die a Roman death, and yet not experience the same treatment as was shewn to those who were crucified with him, in having his bones broken: yea, he shall “be pierced in his hands and feet,” where the bones are so numerous, and by the soldier’s spear also, and yet “not have a bone broken.” He shall die as a malefactor, and yet “have his grave with the rich.” He shall suffer thus under the hand of his enemies, and yet triumph; yea, and triumph by dying, and pass through the grave to his throne of glory; and, after standing at the tribunal of his rebellious creatures, summon the universe to his tribunal, and fix the everlasting doom of men and angels. Say, whether such apparent inconsistencies would ever have been predicted respecting an impostor, or, if predicted, would have been ever realized and fulfilled? There are, it is true, many prophecies which are not yet fulfilled. The restoration of the Jews, the conversion of the Gentiles, the universal establishment of Christ’s kingdom upon earth; these things have not yet taken place: nor have the prophecies taught us to expect that they should yet be accomplished. But the fulfilment of such diversified predictions which we have already seen, leaves us no doubt respecting the accomplishment of the remainder in due season: and this is one reason why the evidence from prophecy is so convincing; that it is ever growing stronger and stronger by the augmented and ever-increasing force which it receives, from the events which are yet daily taking place in the Church and in the world.]

This then may suffice for the first point which we were to consider, namely, the evidence of our religion as founded on prophecy. We now proceed to shew,

II. The use which we should make of that evidence—

“We should take heed to it,” and consider it well;

1. To satisfy our minds respecting the Messiahship of Jesus—

[In the world at large we have nothing to guide us in relation to this point: and even from Judaism we gain but little light. The whole Mosaic dispensation was dark and shadowy: and the very predictions which were handed down to us by successive prophets were so dark, that they were not understood by the very persons who uttered them^d. But these prophecies serve us for a light, which, duly improved, will infallibly lead us to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We may illustrate this by the star which appeared to the Magi in the East, which first of all directed them to Judæa, then to Jerusalem, the capital of Judæa. There they made inquiries respecting "the person who was born King of the Jews." There, they learned that Bethlehem was to be the place of the Messiah's nativity: and *Herod was the person who directed them to go to Bethlehem*. But, when they were going thither, the star which they had before seen in the East went before them, and stood over the very house in which the infant was. So will prophecy guide us. At first we are informed, that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:" but where or when to find him we know not. Next we find, that he shall be of the seed of Abraham; and in the particular line of Isaac, and of Jacob. Proceeding further, we are directed to the family of David; and are told that he shall come whilst the second temple is yet standing, and be born at Bethlehem. Then we come to all the minute particulars respecting him. He must have such a forerunner as Elijah: he must have the Holy Ghost descend upon him: he must work unnumbered miracles in confirmation of his word: he must be scourged, and yet crucified; (though his scourging was inflicted by Pilate in order to prevent his crucifixion). A thousand minute circumstances must attend his death: and on the third day he must rise again; and ascend to heaven, and send down the Holy Ghost upon his Disciples, and enable them to speak all manner of languages, and work all manner of miracles: and, by their instrumentality, he must so establish his kingdom in the world, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it. Now, where shall I find the person in whom all these, and ten thousand other predictions, meet? I go to one and to another; but I am stopped in a moment: I do not find in them any two requisites. I then come to Jesus; and I find he answers the description in *some* particulars. I then follow him to see if other things concur to point him out: and the more minutely I examine, the more evidence I gain, without one single disappointment. As the lot for the discovery of Achan fell first on the tribe, then on the family, then on the household, and then on the individual;

^d 1 Pet. i. 10—12

so does every prophecy lead me nearer and nearer unto Jesus. till they fix infallibly on him as the object of my pursuit, Thus, I say, I take prophecy for my light; and I follow it, till it stands over the very person of my adorable Lord, and leaves me no possibility of doubt respecting his being the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world.]

2. To lead us to an experimental sense of his excellency and glory—

[We must not be satisfied with knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, but must seek to experience all the blessings of his salvation in our souls. Suppose a condemned criminal to receive a pardon from his prince, and at the same time a grant of large estates, and a title to all the highest honours of his kingdom; and the man were to satisfy himself with examining and ascertaining that the writing which conveyed to him these benefits, was not a forgery: what should we say of that man? Should we think him sane? Should we not expect that, as a rational being, he would leave his prison, and go forth to possess his estates and honours? Yet this is the very folly which we are guilty of. We are contented with ascertaining to our satisfaction the Messiahship of Jesus, and go not forth to him to obtain the blessings he has purchased for us. But let us remember, that a lamp is only to guide us through a dark place: when the day has dawned and the sun is risen, we are then to walk in the light of that sun, which will supersede the use of the glimmering taper we have just employed. Now thus it is that the Lord Jesus Christ, “the true Morning-star^e,” “the Sun of Righteousness^f,” will arise in our hearts, and “will manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world^g.” And, as light is its own evidence, so will he bring his own evidence along with him, and prove himself to be the Messiah by the blessings he imparts. Only let that “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^h,” and we shall have the same evidence of his Messiahship as a man has of the sun’s existence when he is basking in the beams of its meridian splendour. This then is what we must seek. We must seek to have “the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts:” and then we shall be able to say to prophecy, as the Samaritans did to the woman who had guided them to Jesus, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the worldⁱ.” It is said of heaven, that “the glory of God

^e Rev. xxii. 16.

^f Mal. iv. 2.

^g John xiv. 22

^h 2 Cor. iv. 6.

ⁱ John iv. 42.

doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof^k:" and thus may it be said of us when Christ has once revealed himself within us; so bright, so cheering, so glorious will be his presence in the soul!]

We may LEARN then from hence,

1. The propriety of considering the evidences of our religion—

[Were we habituated from our early youth to consider these things, how vain and impotent would be the efforts of infidels to shake our faith! If we regarded nothing but intellectual amusement, we can scarcely conceive a richer feast to the mind than the study of prophecy. But, when we reflect that on the truth of Christianity our eternal welfare depends, it is surprising that we are not more interested about this all-important subject. We should not be satisfied with believing Christianity, because our fathers have believed it: we should examine for ourselves. We should search the Old Testament Scriptures, which testify of Christ; and compare them with the New Testament, in which the fulfilment of the prophecies is recorded. Thus should we examine the foundation upon which we propose to build, and assure ourselves that it will bear the edifice which we design to construct upon it.]

2. The folly of resting in them—

[A man who lays a foundation proceeds to build upon it. And so must we do. We have ascertained beyond a doubt that Jesus is the Christ. But what does the assurance of that fact avail us, if we go not to him for the salvation which he has purchased for us? The Israelites, when they found the manna that was round about their tents, inquired, "What is it?" But when they had ascertained that it was a species of bread given them from heaven, were they satisfied with having learned that fact? No: they proceeded to gather it, each one for himself, and then to feed upon it from day to day. Do ye then so in reference to Christ, who is "the true bread from heaven." Do not imagine, that because you know he has been given, and are acquainted also with the ends and purposes for which he has been given, you will receive any benefit from that. You must lay hold upon him, and feed upon him from day to day. If he be indeed, as he has declared, the light of the world, you must walk in his light. Then shall your path to heaven be clear, and your way delightful: and then shall you be prepared to dwell with him in that place, where "the

^k Rev. xxi. 23.

sun shall be no more your light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you, but where the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory¹.”]

¹ Isai. lx. 19.

MMCCCCXXIV.

GOD THE PUNISHER OF SIN.

2 Pet. ii. 4—9. *If God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.*

THERE were in the Apostles' days a set of religious professors, such as, I would fondly hope, scarcely exist at this time. If we take the chapter before us, and the Epistle of St. Jude, and mark the characters which are there portrayed, we shall not know where to look for persons of a similar description: or, if we find a few, they are so few and so insignificant, that they have no influence whatever in the Church. If they were at all numerous, we should not wonder that “the way of truth should be evil spoken of^a.” But what has been, may be: and, if we be not alive to the dangers of an Antinomian spirit, we may yet see “false teachers amongst us, privily bringing in their damnable heresies, and denying the Lord that bought them, and bringing both on themselves and their followers a swift destruction^b.” One of the most fearful and disgusting

^a ver. 2.

^b ver. 1.

traits of such characters is, the boldness and confidence with which they propagate their errors; professing to expect for themselves, and promising to others, impunity in "their pernicious ways." But, whatever they may dream of in relation to their security, "their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not^c." In confirmation of this truth, the Apostle adduces many striking examples, which attest, that God will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve him, and those who serve him not.

The truths deduced from these records will form the ground-work of our present discourse :

I. God knows how to punish impenitent transgressors—

He has inflicted terrible judgments on account of sin—

[*Angels in heaven* have experienced his wrath. Respecting the fall of the angels we know but little. But this we know: there were a countless multitude of angels, once as holy and as happy as any that are now around the throne of God; but, on some temptation, they fell, and "left their first estate" of holy obedience, and for their wickedness were cast down from heaven, into a place of inconceivable horror and misery created on purpose for their reception, where they are "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Their sin will in that day be made known before the whole assembly of men and angels, and the justice of God in their punishment be universally acknowledged. Their misery is not yet complete. God has seen fit to give them somewhat of a respite, as it were, till the counsels of God respecting the redemption of the world shall be completely fulfilled: but then, together with the ungodly from amongst our fallen race, they shall receive their final doom. They are indeed yet continually adding to their former impiety, by labouring with all their might to frustrate the counsels of heaven in the salvation of mankind: and thus are they treasuring up continually an augmented weight of wrath, which at the appointed season shall come upon them to the uttermost.

On men too, even on *the whole world*, has God inflicted

vengeance on account of sin. Scarcely had the world existed fifteen hundred years, before wickedness abounded in it to such a degree, that "God repented that he had made man." On this account, he determined to destroy the world: and for that purpose he sent a deluge, which soon covered the face of the whole world, and overwhelmed every living thing, with the exception of those which, with Noah and his family, were assembled in the ark.

Another instance of God's displeasure against sin has been manifested in *the destruction of Sodom and the cities of the plain*. Grievous beyond measure, and beyond sufferance, was the iniquity of those cities. Yet, if only ten righteous persons had been found in them, God would have spared the whole for their sake. But their being one only, he rained down fire and brimstone upon them from heaven, and reduced them all to ashes, making them a terrible example to the whole world, of the vengeance that should overtake all who should thereafter live ungodly.]

From these instances it is undeniably clear, that he both can, and will, inflict judgments on sin and sinners—

[Here are *facts*; facts, which cannot be denied; facts, which bear upon them the stamp and character of divine agency; facts, which speak so loudly, that we cannot shut our ears against them.

There are doubts on the minds of men: 'Can God, or will he, execute his threatenings, when, if he should proceed according to his word, so many will be destroyed? Shall the great and noble be of no more account in his eyes than the meanest of mankind? or, if some notice shall be taken of sin, shall it be so severe as we are taught to expect?' Look, brethren, into the divine records, and all these doubts shall vanish in an instant. Angels confessedly are a far more exalted race of beings than men: yet not even angels were spared, when once they had sinned against their God; but were cast headlong from heaven into the bottomless abyss of hell. But will God proceed against so many? Look to the old world, where not a human being, except Noah and his family, was saved. But shall it indeed be so terrible? Look at the cities of the plain, and see what terrible destruction was brought on them: and bear in mind, that these very judgments were intended "for an example unto them that should thereafter live ungodly." Look, I say, at these things; and then doubt whether that judgment which is threatened shall be executed; "God will rain down upon the wicked snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest; this shall be their portion to drink^d." If, after

^d Ps. xi. 6.

seeing such proofs of the Divine veracity, we will not believe, we shall be constrained to believe when our own bitter experience shall leave no room for a possibility of doubt. The judgments may be delayed, even as the deluge was: but at the appointed season the vengeance shall come, and shall not tarry.]

But from the forementioned dispensations we are taught, that,

II. He knows also how to deliver and to save his tempted people—

Wonderfully did God interpose in behalf of Noah and of Lot—

[Noah was a righteous man, and “ a preacher of righteousness” to others. For the space of one hundred and twenty years he ceased not to warn and to exhort the world around him: but in all that time we read not of one whom he was the means of converting unto God. He however maintained his steadfastness amidst all the aboundings of iniquity: and God instructed him how to build an ark, for the saving of himself and his household. Of his family there were seven given to him; and he was “ the eighth;” not the eighth lineal descendant from Adam; (for he was *the tenth*;) but one of eight, or the eighth of those who were saved in the ark. Besides him and those embarked in the same vessel with him, not a creature upon earth was saved: but he was brought forth to the new world in perfect safety.

Nor was the deliverance of Lot less wonderful. He also was “ a righteous man:” and his piety was made evident, by the deep interest which he took in the welfare of his fellow-citizens, and by the grief with which the iniquities of all around him oppressed his soul. And, till this righteous man was placed beyond the reach of harm, God himself could not proceed to execute his threatened vengeance. Two angels were sent from heaven to bring him forth, and by a holy violence, as it were, to urge him forward, that he might not be overwhelmed by the impending storm.]

And is he less concerned about his people now ?

[Your temptations and trials may be such as no human wisdom could foresee or avoid. But such were the calamities from which Lot and Noah were delivered. You may be a poor despised creature, derided as an enthusiast by all around you, and accounted either conceited or mad, on account of your hope and confidence in God: but such was the light in which those holy men were viewed by their contemporaries;

yet they were dear to God, and were saved by him with a great and glorious salvation: and so shall you be saved also from your trials, whether they regard your temporal or your eternal welfare: nor shall so much as one thing occur, which shall not be ultimately over-ruled for your good.]

Express ye then your faith in God as they did—

[*Fear to offend him.* No doubt those holy men were sorely tempted at times to yield to the solicitations, and to comply with the practices of those around them. But they maintained their integrity, and walked before God in all good conscience in the midst of all the abominations that surrounded them. So then do ye: let your one concern be to serve and please him. Never forget that God is a holy God, and that he will punish iniquity: and “though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.” Walk uprightly before him; and none can hurt you: but give way to sin; and none can deliver you.

[*Learn also to trust him.* Neither Noah nor Lot had any human help. They trusted in God: and he was all-sufficient for them. Confide ye then in God, as they did. Bear in mind, that he is Almighty to effect whatever will conduce to your welfare; and that he is faithful to all his promises; not one jot or tittle of which shall ever fail.

Finally, *dare to serve him.* “Fear ye not the reproach of man, neither be afraid of his revilings: for the moth shall eat him up.” What if, through the aboundings of iniquity you be as singular as Noah was in the old world, or Lot in Sodom? it is not your fault, but the fault of those who will not serve God. Let the world deride your *fears*: they will ere long see who was right; they who mocked at the impending judgments, or you who sought to escape them. Let them deride your *hopes*: the time is quickly coming, when they will wish that they also had entered into the ark, or fled to the mountain appointed for their abode. Be content to be derided now; in certain expectation, that God will ere long “appear to their shame, but to your unspeakable and everlasting joy.” Whilst they are laughing at you, or sleeping in their sins, “their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.” And, whilst you are faithfully adhering to the service of your God, “the mansions in heaven are preparing for you; and your Lord will quickly come to take you to the possession of them.”]

MMCCCCXXV.

APOSTATES IN A WORSE STATE THAN EVER.

2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. *If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*

THAT persons inspired with the love of God should endeavour to bring their fellow-creatures to the knowledge of him, and to a participation of the blessings which they themselves enjoy, seems easy to be accounted for; because nothing but good can result from their labours: but that men should be active in proselyting to impiety those who are walking uprightly before God, appears almost incredible; because no good whatever can issue from their exertions. Were we to see a bond-slave labouring with anxiety to reduce to the same situation with himself those who were enjoying the sweets of liberty; we should account it strange. Yet is the zeal of many exercised for this very end, whilst they strive to reduce to the bondage of corruption their brethren, who through grace have been delivered from it. In the Apostles' days, some professed to have been favoured with sublimer views of the Christian system than others; and to have juster notions respecting the nature and extent of Christian liberty: and by "speaking great swelling words of vanity, they allured, through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, many who had clean escaped from those who lived in error:" thus, under the semblance of ministers of righteousness, promoting most effectually the interests of Satan's kingdom. And such "false Apostles" will be found in every age, "deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ^a," and ruining the souls whose welfare they

^a 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

profess to seek. That this is the sad effect of their labours, the Apostle does not scruple to affirm: he even declares, that the persons so deceived by them are brought into a worse condition than they were in previous to their first acquaintance with the Gospel salvation.

In this statement of the Apostle we have,

I. A case supposed—

The case which he supposes is simply this; That a man may have attained the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so as to see that salvation is by him alone, even by his blood which he shed for our fallen race, and his righteousness which he wrought out for their acceptance with God. Further, he supposes that a man may have experienced a considerable efficacy from this knowledge, so as to have been sanctified, in some degree, by means of it, and delivered from the pollutions of a sinful world. Thus he may practically and experimentally “have known the way of righteousness, and yet be again so entangled with the world as to be overcome by it;” and be so overcome by it as “to turn away finally and for ever from the holy commandment delivered unto him.”

Now this case may well be supposed—

[Consider *how extremely weak our nature is*; how incapable we are of doing any thing that is good, or of resisting any thing that is evil, any farther than as we are strengthened by the grace of God. As it is of God alone in the first instance that we are enabled “either to will or to do” what is right^b; so is it by the continued operation of his grace alone that we can hold on in the right way: “without Christ” continually assisting us, “we can do nothing^c.”

Consider also *to what innumerable temptations we are exposed*. There is not any thing, however innocent in itself, which may not prove to us an occasion of sin. Our food, our raiment, our connexions in life, may all be inordinately loved, or in some way be employed to ensnare our souls. Wherever we go, and whatever we do, we are exposed to temptations of different kinds; nor can any man living tell what a single hour

^b Phil. ii. 13.

^c John xv. 5.

may bring forth, or what a change may, through the influence of some unforeseen temptation, be speedily wrought in his moral or religious character.

Consider farther, *what both Scripture and experience teach us on this very subject.* Do not the Scriptures tell us, that many had already “made shipwreck both of faith and a good conscience^d,” and that in the latter times such defections would be very numerous^e? St. Paul’s expostulation with some of the Galatian Church deserves particular notice in this point of view: “Now, *after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God,* how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on *you* labour in vain^f.” Why are we so often and so urgently cautioned against “being moved away from the hope of the Gospel,” and “falling from our own steadfastness,” if no such instance could occur? Is the case of Demas no warning to us? And have we not ourselves either known, or heard of, many, who, like him, “after running well for a season, have been hindered,” and, like Lot’s wife, become monuments and warnings to all around them? Are the stony-ground hearers, and the thorny-ground so rare in the Church, that there is no foundation for the supposition in our text?]

To attempt to invalidate the supposition by an appeal to human systems, is highly inexpedient—

[We never can sufficiently deplore the use which is made of human systems. Men will attach themselves to some fallible creature like themselves, and so adopt his sentiments, as to reject even the Scripture itself, when its declarations militate against their favourite opinions. There are in the Church of God not a few, who would shut their ears against a faithful exposition of our text, as much as they would against blasphemy itself; because they cannot reconcile the leading sentiment contained in it with the dogmas of their party. But who are we that we are to sit in judgment upon the sacred records, and to wrest from its obvious meaning every sentence which does not accord with our views? That there is no real contradiction between the supposition in our text, and many declarations in Scripture which have an opposite aspect, we could easily shew, if it would not draw us too far from our subject: but suffice it to say, that many assertions, which are erroneously *thought opposite* to each other, have in reality a subserviency the one to the other, and, like wheels moving in an opposite direction, concur to the production of one common end. I therefore entreat you, brethren, not to attempt to

^d 1 Tim. i. 19.

^e 1 Tim. iv. 1.

^f Gal. iv. 9, 11.

weaken the force of the supposition in my text, by an appeal to human systems; but to admit it as a salutary caution to yourselves, and to improve it with all diligence, that you yourselves may not become examples of the case that is supposed.]

Admitting then the possibility of the case supposed, let me draw your attention to,

II. The evil of it declared—

Wherever such a case occurs, the man is indeed in a most pitiable condition: “His last end is worse than his beginning.” Yes verily, he is in a worse state than ever,

1. In respect of guilt—

[The more light a man has in his mind, the more he sins if he resist that light. Now in the case under our consideration, the person is supposed to have obtained “a knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and such a measure of it as has been attended with the happiest effects; and yet, after knowing the way of righteousness, to depart from it.” Here then he must sin against light and knowledge: he must violate the dictates of his own conscience: for, though it is true enough, that a man may persuade himself that he is acting right, whilst yet he is violating the plainest commands of God, he cannot experience a transition from the service of God to the service of Satan without many rebukes from conscience, and strong misgivings in his mind. And every step he takes in such a state exceedingly augments and aggravates his guilt: insomuch that the sins which he committed in his days of ignorance, have no guilt in comparison of that which he now contracts. What our blessed Lord said to the Jews of old is strictly applicable to him: “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin^s.” If to this be added, that in departing from the ways of righteousness he in a tenfold degree dishonours God, and brings disgrace upon his Gospel, and weakens the hands of the godly, and hardens the hearts of the ungodly, the sin of an apostate is great indeed.]

2. In respect of bondage—

[The Spirit of God strives more or less with every living man^h: but with those who have experienced the sanctifying effects of the knowledge of Christ, he must of necessity have wrought in a more abundant measure. Consequently, by the increased resistance necessary to overcome his sacred motions,

^s John xv. 22.

^h Gen. vi. 3.

he must have been the more deeply "grievedⁱ." And when once "the Spirit is quenched^k," and caused "to depart^l," and is so "vexed" as to become an "enemy^m" to the backslidden soul, What can be expected but that Satan should re-occupy the post from which he had been driven, and bind in stronger chains than ever his unhappy captive? This our blessed Lord has taught us to expect. He says, that Satan, under such circumstances, "will bring with him seven other spirits more wicked, if possible, than himself; and they will enter into the backslider's heart, and dwell there: and that the last state of that man will be worse than the firstⁿ." The heart of the apostate must of necessity become more hardened in proportion as he has "rebelled against the light," and provoked God to give him up to his own heart's lusts. Hence the apostle speaks of it as "*impossible* to renew such an one to repentance^o." By this I understand not that it is *absolutely* impossible, but so difficult as to be beyond all reasonable expectation.]

3. In respect of condemnation—

[If guilt be increased, an increase of punishment must follow of course. "The servant that knows his lord's will and does it not, will be beaten with many stripes;" whilst he who sins through ignorance will be beaten with comparatively "few stripes^p." Hence our Lord declared to the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum, that it should be "more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for them^q:" for though their wickedness was not of the precise nature with that which so abounded in Sodom, yet it was committed in the midst of advantages which Sodom and Gomorrha never enjoyed. The same may be said of the apostate: "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour us." And this judgment will be proportioned to the guilt which we have contracted by our abuse of our pre-eminent advantages: for (it is added), "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and *hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace^r?*"

From all these considerations it is clear, that the last state

ⁱ Eph. iv. 30.

^k 1 Thess. v. 19.

^l Hos. ix. 12.

^m Isai. lxiii. 10.

ⁿ Matt. xii. 43—45.

^o Heb. vi. 4—6.

^p Luke xii. 47, 48.

^q Matt. x. 15.

^r Heb. x. 26—29.

of the apostate is worse than his beginning: and that it would have "been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after he has known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him."]

APPLICATION—

There are, it is to be feared, *many* here present, who have never yet been delivered from the pollutions of the world—

[In truth, of this description are the great mass of nominal Christians throughout the world. If you take men's victory over the world as a criterion whereby to judge of their piety, you will find amongst the professors of Christianity quite as little as amongst Jews, or Mahometans, or Pagans. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, that is, pleasure, and riches, and honour, are the great objects of ambition in every place: and, if a man be dead to them, he is "a sign and a wonder" to all around him. Look, beloved brethren, and see how your hearts stand affected to these things. Can you truly say, as before God, that "you have overcome the world," and that it is, as it were, under your feet? Have you ever had such views of "the cross of Christ, as have rendered the world and all its vanities like a crucified object in your eyes; and that you also are become like one crucified unto it^s?" I entreat you to attend to what the Apostle speaks in my text: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." *He here takes for granted*, that this effect will follow, universally, and invariably, follow; *all who know our adorable Saviour will escape the pollutions of the world*. I pray you to mark this: *the Apostle takes it for granted*: and he was right; for there never was, nor ever will be, one exception to this truth: *all who know Christ aright, will become dead to the world, and escape from its pollutions*. Bring yourselves then to this test: try yourselves, ye whose friends and companions are worldly, whose desires and pursuits are worldly, whose joys and sorrows are worldly. If you were Christians indeed, you would "not be of the world, even as Christ was not of the world^t." You cannot be of the world, and of God too; for they stand in direct opposition to each other^u. "You cannot serve God and Mammon^x." Know then, that whilst you love and "*mind earthly things*^y," you have never yet "known the way of righteousness^z:" and that though your state *may be "worse," it is exceeding bad*: for, if "the last end of the apostate is *worse* than his beginning," his beginning must of necessity be *bad*:

^s Gal. vi. 14.

^x Matt. vi. 24.

^t John xvii. 16.

^y Phil. iii. 18, 19.

^u 1 John iv. 5, 6.

^z 2 Pet. ii. 21.

and such is the state of all who have not yet devoted themselves to the service of their God.]

But *some* there are, we may hope, who have, through the knowledge of Christ, been delivered from the world—

[It is well you have thus far answered one end for which our blessed Saviour died: for “he gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world^a.” But you will do well to bear in mind the caution in our text. A change of situation often brings with it a change of conduct. Perhaps you may be somewhat advanced in rank or station, or may form some new connexion, or be brought into some new circumstances: and you may easily persuade yourself that this change not only sanctions, but requires, a change in your habits and deportment. But “beware lest, as Satan beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so you also should be turned from the simplicity that is in Christ.” Whatever your situation or circumstances may be, God’s command to you is, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him^b.*” Even “the friendship of the world, if unduly sought or delighted in, is enmity with God^c.” Beware then how *in heart and affection* you return to the world. “Remember Lot’s wife.” “After once putting your hand to the plough, you must never look back again^d.” Methinks, if you would duly consider the image by which such apostasy is represented in the words following my text, you never *could* return to the world. One scarcely knows how even to quote the Scripture itself; so exceedingly does one nauseate the ideas suggested in it, and so utterly do one’s feelings revolt from it. But it does paint the world, and all who love it, in very humiliating colours. O that all the votaries of gaiety, and fashion, and pleasure could but hear what the Apostle compares them to; even to “swine wallowing in the mire!” and that all who are tempted to conform to them, could be brought to reflect on “a dog returning to his own vomit again!” Yes, brethren, *this is the feast to which your earthly friends invite you.* Ah! learn to view the world as God views it: learn to regard it as a country infected with the plague: and let your great concern be to get through it in safety. Go not unnecessarily where the infection rages most: but “come out from among them, and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing^e.” And, as it was the knowledge of Christ which first brought you forth from the world and its pollutions, seek to “grow in the knowledge of your

^a Gal. i. 4.

^b 1 John ii. 15.

^c Jam. iv. 4.

^d Luke ix. 62.

^e 2 Cor. vi. 17.

adorable Lord and Saviour^f," that, through the abundance of his grace communicated to you, you may live more than ever unto God; and that, "shining already as lights in the world^g," your "path may shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day^h."]]

^f 2 Pet. iii. 18.

^g Phil. ii. 15.

^h Prov. iv. 18.

MMCCCCXXVI.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

2 Pet. iii. 7. *The day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.*

A FUTURE state of rewards and punishments is, in theory, universally acknowledged; but, in practice, it is grievously forgotten, and, by not a few, is held in derision. Because God delays to execute his threatenings against ungodly men, they imagine that he never will execute them. Just as in the days of Noah, because the menaced deluge was suspended for one hundred and twenty years, it was to multitudes an object of scorn; so now the idea of an universal conflagration, when "the heavens and the earth shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up," is deemed a fable; and the destruction which will then come upon the whole ungodly world is disregarded, as the dream of a fanatical or superstitious mind. The day of judgment, it is hoped, will prove alike favourable to all; and no great difference be put between the righteous and the wicked. But the name given to that day deserves particular attention: and I beg you to attend to it, with the humility that becomes you, whilst I open to you,

I. The terms by which the day of judgment is here designated—

It is called "The day of the perdition of ungodly men." Let us consider,

1. Why it is so called—

[As, at that period, rewards and punishments will be alike distributed, one would suppose that that day might with equal propriety be called "the day of the salvation of godly men." But this designation would by no means be so proper as that which is given to it in my text. For, though the salvation of the godly will be then *completed*, it will not then be *begun*: it is begun in this world: the saints, as soon as they believe in Christ, "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls^a:" nor is there any one blessing which they shall ever enjoy in heaven, but is now conferred upon them through the medium of faith; insomuch, that they are represented by St. Paul as already "sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus^b." Their bodies will indeed be then partakers with their souls in the felicity of heaven; but, as far as their souls are concerned, they have already, even whilst here upon earth, an earnest and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance. The ungodly, on the other hand, have to wait for their award till the day of judgment. I say not, indeed, but that God does sometimes make them to feel a foretaste of his wrath even here; but, generally speaking, they are left to pass their time here under a fearful delusion, by which they pacify their consciences, and lull themselves asleep in their sins. They are under *condemnation* now, as much as ever they will be: as it is said, "He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he believeth not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God^c:" but the day of *execution* is that which is specified in my text: and so St. Jude expressly calls it; "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, The Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to *execute judgment* upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodlily committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him^d." And the great use of the judgment will be, to display before the whole assembled universe the justice of God in inflicting on the wicked this punishment, whilst so different a portion is given to the righteous: as St. Paul has said; "It is the *day of wrath*, and of the revelation of *the righteous judgment of God*^e." Hence there is a peculiar propriety in that name, by which the day of judgment is designated, in my text, "The day of the perdition of ungodly men."]

2. That it will so prove—

[Doubtless, at the time of our death, a suitable award is made to every man: but at the day of judgment there will be a public assignment of this doom to every individual of

^a 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

^b Eph. ii. 6.

^c John iii. 18.

^d Jude, ver. 14, 15.

^e Rom. ii. 5.

mankind, attended with solemnities which will greatly augment the keenness of their perceptions; and the bodies of all will be made partakers of the sentence that shall be accorded to their souls. In that day every child of man, from the very beginning to the end of time, will be called forth, and summoned to appear before their God. "The sea will give up the dead which were in it; and death and hell will deliver up the dead which were in them: and all will be judged according to their works: and whosoever is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire^f." Then will be a separation between the righteous and the wicked, even as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and then shall the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal^g." Yes, verily, this separation shall take place; for "the wicked," whatever they may now imagine, "shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous^h."]

And now let me endeavour to place before you,

II. The considerations which such a view of the judgment should suggest to our minds—

And surely it should lead us,

1. To inquire into our own real character—

[At that day, the Judge will not determine according to our partial views, but according to his own most righteous law: and, whatever may have been the line chosen by ourselves, he will bring our conduct to that infallible test, and determine our doom in perfect accordance with it.]

Now, in that day, the ungodly, of every class, will be sentenced to perdition. St. Paul appeals to us respecting this: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" And then he guards us against that self-deception to which we are so prone; "Be not deceived:" and then, enumerating a sad catalogue of persons addicted to wickedness, as fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, he declares that no one of them "shall ever inherit the kingdom of Godⁱ." To these may be added "the impenitent" and "unbelieving, as sure to take their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone^k." Nor must we omit the unregenerate, even though their lives may have been as exemplary as that of Nicodemus himself: for, "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God^l." Care, too, must be taken not to deceive ourselves in

^f Rev. xx. 13—15.

^g Matt. xxv. 46.

^h Ps. i. 5.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

^k Luke xiii. 3, 5. Rev. xxi. 8.

^l John iii. 3, 5.

relation to our own experience: for there is much hypocrisy in the human heart; and “a hypocrite, even though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and reach unto the clouds, will be detected by God, and will perish for ever, like his own dung;” so that his former admirers, with a mixture of surprise and grief, will say, “Where is he^m?” The apostate too, however eminent his profession may have been, will share the same fate. The man who turns back, “turns back to inevitable and everlasting perditionⁿ,” and plunges himself into deeper misery than he would ever have experienced if he had never known the way of righteousness at all^o. Seeing, then, that so many must perish, is it not of vast importance that we ascertain our true character, in order that we may know what doom we are to expect? Yes, beloved, to all of you I would most affectionately say, “Judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord.”]

2. To realize in our minds the terrors of that day—

[St. Paul, “knowing the terrors of the Lord, persuaded men^p.” And we, too, should meditate upon them, in order to stimulate our souls to a holy activity in the ways of God. Consider how many millions of our fellow-creatures will in that day “call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of that Lamb,” whom here they neglected and despised^q! What “fearfulness, too, will surprise the hypocrites,” who indulged the vain conceit that their specious conduct would find a happier issue! and with what bitter cries will they exclaim, “Who amongst us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings^r?” In vain will they knock at the gate of heaven, crying, “Lord, Lord, open to us;” since they were content with the lamp of outward profession, without the oil of true grace in their hearts^s. Some will venture even to expostulate with God, as though they had been hardly treated: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?” But they will be repelled with that indignant reproof, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye who wrought iniquity^t.” O, the millions, the countless millions, that will perish in that day; all of them “drinking of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb;

^m Job xx. 4—7.

ⁿ Heb. x. 39.

^o 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

^p 2 Cor. v. 11.

^q Rev. vi. 15—17.

^r Isai. xxxiii. 14.

^s Matt. xxv. 3, 11, 12.

^t Matt. vii. 22, 23.

and the smoke of their torment will ascend up for ever and ever: and they will have no rest day nor night^u!" Who can reflect on this, and not determine, through grace, to shun so awful a doom, and to make "the long-suffering of God the means and prelude of everlasting salvation^x?"

3. To improve to the uttermost the advantages we now enjoy—

[This is the day of grace; "this is the day of salvation," to every soul that desires to be saved^y. Yes, truly, "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and live^z." Do but consider this, my brethren: you will never have to cast the blame of your condemnation upon God. If the day of judgment prove the day of perdition to your souls, the fault will be utterly your own. There is no want of sufficiency in Christ to save any who shall come unto God by him. Nor is there in him any want of willingness to save even the chief of sinners. Of those who rejected him in the days of old, and provoked him to abandon them to utter destruction, he complained, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" The same may he say of you in the day of judgment. Be diligent, then, in the use of all the appointed means of salvation. Repent of all your sins: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world. Flee to him for refuge: lay hold upon him: hide yourselves under the shadow of his wings: and then, in that awful day, when all who offend and do wickedly shall be cast out, you shall stand before him with great boldness, and "be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless^a."]

^u Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

^x ver. 15.

^y 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^z ver. 9.

^a ver. 14.

MMCCCCXXVII.

GOD'S FORBEARANCE.

2 Pet. iii. 8, 9. *Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 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.*

THE compassion of Almighty God has in all ages been abused by ungodly men, and made an occasion of impenitence and persevering wickedness. In the

minds of many it has been made a source of triumph against God, as though he were not able or willing to vindicate the honour of his law. Just as our blessed Lord's condescension in noticing an abandoned, but penitent, woman was made by his enemies a reason for doubting whether he was a prophet—since, if he had been really inspired of God, he must have known how unworthy she was of such an honour; so the forbearance of God with an ungodly world has given occasion to “scoffers to say, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” But such persons forget, that, however long God may have borne with the wickedness of men, he has given at the deluge a very awful testimony of his determination to punish it. And, though he now bears with sinners, he reserves the earth for a similar display of his vengeance by fire; and will surely, in due season, execute his threatenings against sin and sinners. In the mean time, however, he waits to be gracious to returning penitents, and will gladly lay aside his anger the very instant that they come to him in his appointed way.

The words which I have now read will naturally lead me to shew,

I. In what light God's delay of his final judgment should be viewed—

God forbears to punish sinners, because he desires to save them—

[Scoffers, indeed, impute it to weakness or indifference; and take occasion from it to cast reflections on God himself, as either not seeing, or not regarding, the wickedness of men: since, if he did see it, and did regard it as he professes to do, it would not be possible for him to pass it over from year to year in the way he does. But such persons forget, that *time*, which to *us* appears long, has, in fact, no existence before God. All things past, present, and future, are alike present with him, and form in his mind but a single point: “One day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Men are afraid to suspend the exercise of *their* displeasure for a number of years, lest they should be considered as acting from policy, or a sense of weakness and fear. But

with God there is no scope for any such views or feelings. He is able to punish whensoever he will: nor is it possible for any to escape from his hands. He, however, is averse to proceed to extremities, till he has used every possible method to reclaim sinners, and to open a way for the exercise of his mercy towards them. "He is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." He is kept back, not by any conscious weakness, or by indifference, or by fear, or by any other motive which may be supposed to influence us: he is restrained by long-suffering alone, and by a desire to spare those who have deserved punishment.]

He desires to save every child of man—

["He is not willing that any should perish:" no; he would not that so much as one should ever become a monument of his indignation. This he affirms in the strongest manner; yea, and confirms his assertion with an oath: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live^a." It is surprising, that any, after such a declaration as this, should maintain the doctrine of absolute reprobation. Were that, or any other doctrine, clearly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, I should feel it my duty to receive it with the simplicity of a little child: but to receive it merely as a deduction of human reason, an inference drawn by weak and fallible man from the doctrine of election, when the whole Scriptures uniformly declare the very reverse, is, to say the least, very dangerous, and exceeding sinful. I know it is said of ungodly men, by St. Jude, that "they were of old ordained to this condemnation^b." I know, also, that St. Peter says of many, that they "stumbled at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed^c." But it is *not of individuals* that these Apostles speak, but *of characters*. God has ordained, that they who will not receive the truth with humility shall stumble at it; and that they who will resist the faith which he has delivered to his saints, shall be left to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and to deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is a wise and righteous appointment. But it is a far different thing from creating any with a fixed determination to consign them over to perdition, purely of his own arbitrary will, without any fault of theirs. Such an idea as this is directly contradicted by the assertion in my text: and by the oath which I have before mentioned; and by numberless other portions of Scripture, which can admit of no doubt. Our blessed Lord said to his hearers, "Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life^d:" and to the Jews, even

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 8.

^b Jude, ver. 4.

^d John v. 40.

after they were given up to the judgments they had merited, he said, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes^e." And again: "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not^f." The whole Scripture attests, that "God would rather that all should come to repentance and live." He "commands *all men everywhere* to repent^g." He exhorts them to it also; saying, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel^h?" and he declares to all, without exception, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast outⁱ." Now shall we, in deference to human systems, set aside all these passages of holy writ? God forbid: we dare not do so: and if we cannot mark out the precise boundaries where truths of an opposite aspect meet, we are contented to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." If we choose to speculate on divine truths, we may soon get out of our depth: but if we will practically apply them to our own souls, we shall find them as clear as we can wish. Where is the man who has not experienced more or less the strivings of God's Spirit in his soul^k? Who amongst us has not a consciousness that he has resisted those strivings^l; and that, if he had made a due improvement of them, "God would have given him more grace^m?" The truth, then, is plain: if God forbear to execute upon the world the judgments we deserve, it is not because he is indifferent about our proceedings, but because he is long-suffering towards us, and desirous, if we would improve the opportunity, to save us all. This is the true reason why "he endures, with such astonishing forbearance, the vessels of wrath who are fitted for destructionⁿ."]

Having seen the long-suffering of God towards this sinful world, let us consider,

II. What improvement we should make of it—

From a sense of it, we should be led,

1. To acknowledge our obligations to him—

[Who amongst us has not reason to acknowledge the long-suffering of God towards him? Who is not a sinner before God? Who has not merited his wrathful indignation? Who might not, on ten thousand occasions, have justly been cut off, and made a monument of God's righteous displeasure?

^e Luke xix. 42.

^h Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^l Acts vii. 51.

^f Matt. xxiii. 37.

ⁱ John vi. 37.

^m Jam. iv. 6.

^g Acts xvii. 30.

^k Gen. vi. 3.

ⁿ Rom. ix. 22.

— — — Let us not, then, impute his forbearance to any indifference in him respecting us, but to its true source, his tender compassion, and unbounded mercy — — —]

2. To humble ourselves before him—

[“ Because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of too many are fully set in them to do evil^o.” But let it not be so with us. St. Paul tells us, that the true intent of “ God’s patience and long-suffering is, to lead us to repentance^p.” Let it operate upon us in this manner; and let us humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes.]

3. To justify him in his judgments—

[Whatever men may urge against the denunciations of God’s wrath, we are sure he will be justified in every sentence which he shall pass, and be just in every judgment which he shall inflict^q. The man who had not on the wedding-garment was speechless, when called to an account for his neglect. He might have said, “ Lord, I was called suddenly, and compelled to come in,” and had not time to procure the requisite apparel. But there was no room for any such excuse. The Master of the feast would have provided him with the garment; but he would not deign to ask for it. Therefore, when cast into outer darkness, he had not a word to say in vindication of himself, or to criminate his Lord. And so, when sentence shall be past on those who despise the forbearance of their God, the whole host of heaven will cry, “ Righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”]

4. To improve the time that may be yet allotted to us—

[God is now “ giving us space to repent.” But how soon his patience may come to an end, we know not. We see persons taken away at every period of life^r — — — Let not another day pass unimproved; but “ to-day, whilst it is called to-day, turn unto the Lord, and seek him with your whole hearts.”]

^o Eccl. viii. 11.

^p Rom. ii. 4.

^q Ps. li. 4.

^r If this be a *Funeral Sermon*, any particulars may be mentioned here.

MMCCCCXXVIII.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

2 Pet. iii. 10—14. *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless^a.*

* * * * *

BUT have we never contemplated our own situation? Have we never considered that the solemnities of the judgment day are now in actual preparation; and that, not our own individual dwelling, or friends only, will be affected by them, but the whole universe? Our minds are at this time justly, and almost exclusively, engrossed with the consideration of this tremendous plot, which God, in mercy to this whole nation, has defeated. And I hope rather to strengthen, than efface, those impressions, by leading you to contemplate,

I. The events predicted in our text—

These are widely different indeed from each other; but they are inseparably connected, and infallibly simultaneous. Let us consider,

1. The dissolution of this present world—

[Once the world and every thing in it, with the exception of that small portion contained in the ark, was destroyed by water: and there is a time coming when the whole of it without exception will be destroyed by fire. Of the latter there

^a This was preached on occasion of *the horrible conspiracy* (called "*The Cato-Street Conspiracy*," in February, 1820,) *against his Majesty's Ministers*; the meditated destruction of whom, by the explosion of a grenade of 14lbs. weight, afforded very abundant and appropriate matter as introductory to this Discourse.

will be no more expectation at the time, than there was of the former. In the days of Noah they were eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage, as securely as at any former period of the world: and would not believe that they were in any danger, till, on the entrance of Noah into the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all. So, at the last day, the inhabitants of this globe will be as little occupied with the thoughts of judgment, as we are at this moment. Our Lord tells us, that “he will come as a thief in the night;” that, without any previous warning, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, with every thing in it, shall be burnt up.”

Conceive now the feelings of men at the very first moment that this tremendous and irresistible combustion shall burst forth. Some faint idea may be entertained, if only you suppose that the plot, which God in his mercy has defeated, had been accomplished. Conceive the company that was assembled, either as partaking of the friendly repast, or as deliberating on the affairs of state, and consulting with each other for the welfare of the nation: conceive of them as beholding the desolating instrument cast in among them, and ready in a few moments to execute its destined office: with what terror would they be filled! and, if a moment were allowed for an ejaculatory petition, with what ardour would they implore mercy for their souls! Thus will it be in every quarter of the globe. All, except the remnant, who, in the habit of their minds, have been dying daily, will be ready to “call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb,” whose judgment they dread.

But to that happy remnant another scene will open: for to them shall be revealed,]

2. The establishment of a new and better state—

[They, “according to God’s promise, are even now looking for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness:” and then shall that new state open to their view. In the bold and figurative language of prophecy, the Millennial state is sometimes described under these terms^b — — — and well it may be; since, when compared with the present state of things, wherein iniquity so awfully abounds, it will be indeed “a new creation.” But the period here spoken of is contemporaneous with the final judgment; and, consequently, must refer to heaven itself, where neither sin nor sorrow can ever dwell. That is the period of which St. John speaks, when he says, “I saw a new heaven, and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. . . . and there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth^c.”

^b Isai. lxxv. 17. and lxxvi. 22.

^c Rev. xxi. 1, 27.

Contemplate the feelings of the godly at the moment that this glory bursts upon them. In vain shall we look for any thing wherewith to compare it upon earth. Alas! the visions of the godly are not so bright; nor do their sublimest raptures make so deep an impression as do the terrors which are inspired by sudden and appalling danger. But, as contrasted with the feelings of the ungodly, we may conceive in some little measure their bliss. Let us picture to ourselves the Rich Man and Lazarus, entering at the same moment into the eternal world, the one beholding the abyss of hell ready to swallow him up, and the other fixing his eyes upon his God and Saviour, whose glory and felicity he is about to share. But]

We shall contemplate these things to more advantage, if we view them in connexion with,

II. The effect which the prospect of those events should produce upon us—

This the Apostle sets forth,

1. In a way of candid appeal—

[We all look for these events; nor do any of us doubt but that they will come in due season. Let me then ask of all who are here present, “What manner of persons ought ye to be?” Should you not be waiting for that period “in all holy conversation and godliness?” Should you not be “looking for it, and hasting unto it” with a holy eagerness, to meet “your God at his coming?” As for the things of this life, they should be as nothing in our eyes. Being so soon to part with them all, we should sit loose to them; as the Apostle says; “They who have wives should be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: *for the fashion of this world passeth away*^d.” I well know, that, when such a state of mind is recommended by us, we appear to require more than is necessary. But I will venture to appeal to every considerate man, whether this be not the conversation that becomes us, when our God is coming to judgment; and when he has told us that “he will come as a thief in the night?” Would it not be madness to be dreaming of “peace and safety, till sudden and everlasting destruction come upon us^e?” The wise virgins were not wise in this respect, that, like the foolish virgins, they slumbered and slept. Happily for them, they had oil in their vessels with their lamps; or else, with the foolish virgins, they also would have been excluded from the nuptial feast. The true frame for all

^d 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

^e 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

of us to be in, is that of ardent and affectionate expectation; “our loins being girt, and our lamps trimmed,” and our whole souls as “those who wait for the coming of their Lord.” Maintaining this frame, you may rest assured, that “the Lord Jesus Christ will confirm you to the end^f,” and present you faultless before the presence of his Father’s glory with exceeding joy^g.”]

2. In a way of affectionate entreaty—

[“Beloved” brethren, “seeing that ye look for such things, I beseech you be diligent that ye may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless.” Think, if that day should come upon you unprepared; and, instead of going forth to meet a loving Saviour, you should behold only an angry and avenging Judge; how terrible will this be! Lose not an hour then; but be diligent in seeking peace with God through the Son of his love. It is the blood of Christ, and that only, which can effect your reconciliation with God: and therefore lose not a moment in sprinkling it upon your souls; yea, let your holiest actions, as well as your more acknowledged sins, be purged with it from their defilement. Endeavour, too, to preserve a “spotless and blameless” conduct throughout your whole lives, being “sincere and without offence until the day of Christ.” Let no allowed sin be found in you: but so “cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, that you may perfect holiness in the fear of God,” and be acknowledged by him as “Israelites indeed, in whom there was no guile.” This will doubtless require “diligence:” but surely the occasion justly deserves all the care and labour you can bestow upon it. Can you doubt whether those, whose lives have been lately in such imminent peril, have taken precautions against any future surprise? Would they not be justly blamed, if they were to be as heedless of danger, as they were before they knew of the conspiracy that was formed against them? Be *ye* then on your guard. *They*, whatever attempts were made against them, might escape: but no possibility of escape remains for *you*. “Your God will come, even as a thief in the night;” and therefore I entreat you all to be diligent, that, “whether he come in the evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning^h,” “you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless” — — —

I only add, “Account the long-suffering of God to be

^f 1 Cor. i. 7, 8.

^g Jude, ver. 24.

^h Mark xiii. 32—37. The particular instructions in this passage, “Take ye heed, watch, and pray,” may here be dwelt upon to advantage.

salvation^l." You have long been spared; and God is still forbearing to call you to your great account. "Beloved brethren," "despise not this goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of your God; but let them lead you to repentance^k." Though the general judgment should be long deferred, your own particular doom will be fixed the very instant that you shall be summoned into the eternal world. Do not then delay till it be too late; but "to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts," lest God cut you off in your sins, and "swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest."]

^l ver. 15.

^k Rom. ii. 4.

MMCCCCXXIX.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

2 Pet. iii. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

HOWEVER averse men are to receive warnings and exhortations from each other, there is, in reality, no greater proof of affection, than the administering of faithful cautions, and salutary advice, to those whom we love. It is evident how much St. Peter's mind was warmed with affection towards his brethren, since he, no less than four times in this short chapter, addresses them by that endearing term, "Beloved." And how did he testify his love, but by guarding them against the dangers to which they were exposed, and by prescribing to them the most effectual means of deliverance and safety?

Let his word then be thankfully received by us, while we consider,

I. His caution against apostasy—

[The wicked will take occasion from God's forbearance to question his remunerative justice^a — — — and even the godly need to be on their guard against the influence of this delusion^b — — — Certain it is, that they are liable to fall from their

^a ver. 3, 4. with Eccl. viii. 11.

^b Eph. iv. 14. 2 Pet. ii. 18,

own steadfastness; and that, without the greatest vigilance, they will do so^c — — — But they “know” the certainty and awfulness of the day of judgment, and should therefore be afraid of meeting it unprepared. It will *then* be too late to rectify their “errors,” or repent of their instability^d; and this consideration should make them doubly cautious against every occasion of falling^e.]

II. His direction for preventing it—

The Christian should seek to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”—

[None, who have received grace, will be satisfied with the measure they have received; but they will be seeking to attain more and more^f. Nor will any, who know Christ, think they “know any thing yet as they ought to know:” they will perceive that there are in him “treasures of knowledge,” which they have never explored^g, and which to all eternity will be progressively opening to their view.

Hence the Christian’s duty is to be continually advancing in every part of the divine life; and to “make his profiting appear unto all men.”]

This will be his best, his only, preservative against apostasy—

[Painting or statuary admit of intermissions in labour: such work, left for a season, may be resumed without any increased difficulty: but, in religion, every intermission is a positive injury: if the work proceed not, it declines: it always either waxes or wanes. Now every declension weakens the vital principle within us—restores to activity our dormant corruptions—exposes us to the assaults of our great adversary—and provokes God to withdraw his accustomed aid^h: consequently, our downfall begun, will, if not prevented by sovereign grace, be speedy, gradual, irretrievable. On the other hand, a progress in grace confirms every good habit—fastens round us the whole armour of God—keeps our enemy at a distance—and secures to us the continued protection of

^c 1 Tim. i. 19. 2 Tim. ii. 18. Matt. xxiv. 12. 1 Cor. ix. 27. Whether God will restore his elect, is a distinct question, that, if introduced in this place, might uphold a system, but would weaken the force of the Apostle’s caution.

^d Matt. xxv. 11—13.

^e This argument is *thrice* urged; ver. 11, 14, 17.

^f Phil. iii. 12—14.

^g Col. ii. 3. St. Paul, after preaching Christ for above twenty years, yet sought above all things to “know him.” Phil. iii. 8, 10.

^h Mark these particulars very distinctly, *pausing at the end of each*. And do the same in that which follows.

heaven. Go on adding to your grace, says God, "and you shall never fallⁱ."]

ADVICE—

1. Reflect much and often on the day of judgment—

[Through a forgetfulness of that day we become the sport of every temptation: but if we would frequently endeavour to realize the strictness of the scrutiny, and the severity of the judgment which will then take place, we should be more fortified against error in principle, or evil in practice. We must expect our Lord's coming, if we would be found ready on his arrival^k.]

2. Be diligent in the use of all the means of grace—

[It is in vain to hope that we shall grow in grace or knowledge, if we do not use the means which God has appointed. But, if we watch unto prayer, and conscientiously devote ourselves to him, he will "bless us with all spiritual blessings:" "our faith and love shall grow exceedingly;" our "hope shall abound through the power of the Holy Ghost," and, from being "babes," we shall become "children, young men, and fathers in Christ^l:" and, having attained at last "the measure of the full stature of Christ^m," we shall "enter into his joy," and be partakers of his glory for evermore.]

ⁱ 2 Pet. i. 5, 10, 11.

^k Matt. xxiv. 42—44.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 1. and 1 John ii. 12—14.

^m Eph. iv. 13.

1 JOHN.

MMCCCCXXX.

THE BENEFITS ARISING FROM FAITH IN CHRIST.

1 John i. 1—3. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

IT is impossible to read these words, and not be struck with the extreme earnestness of the Apostle in his mode of giving the testimony before us. It seems evident, that the truths which he affirms had been much controverted; and that the evidence on which they rested had been called in question. And the fact was, that many heresies had arisen even whilst he was yet alive. Some even went so far as to deny that Jesus had ever died and risen again: they asserted, that all those transactions, which were recorded of him by the Evangelists, had taken place in appearance only, and not in reality. Against such absurd and impious conceits, St. John, now at a very advanced age, bore his testimony with a zeal suited to the occasion. He was the only surviving witness of the events referred to; and hence he repeats, even to tautology, the evidence which he had had again and again, from all his senses, respecting the truth

of all that he affirmed: and he urges upon the whole Christian Church the reception of his testimony, by representing the incalculable benefits which all who believed it would receive.

That we may enter fully into the declarations before us, let us consider,

I. His testimony—

This may be understood as relating to the Gospel generally—

[The Gospel is certainly called “the word of life^a” and it was from eternity hid “with the Father^b,” and at last, “at the beginning” of the Gospel dispensation^c, was manifested to the Apostles^d, who had every possible means of examining and ascertaining the truth of it^e; and who, in consequence of the fullest conviction in their own minds, “bare witness” to it as the means by which alone eternal life could be obtained^f. This sense, I say, the words before us may very properly bear: and, inasmuch as the Gospel is elsewhere denominated “the word of life,” (which Christ is not;) and the words “from the beginning^g,” generally, though not always in the Epistles of St. John, import, “from the beginning of the Gospel dispensation,” it is by no means improbable that this may be the true sense of the passage.

On the other hand, his mode of expression is far less proper, if applied to the Gospel, than if applied personally to the Lord Jesus Christ; to whom the generality of commentators suppose the Apostle to refer. We therefore observe, that]

It may be understood also as relating personally to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[He, though not called “the word of life,” is constantly known as “The Word^h.” He also is called “The Lifeⁱ” and what seems more particularly to determine the point is, that he is in this very epistle called, “Eternal Life:” “This is the true God, and Eternal Life^k.” He too was from eternity “with the Father^l,” and in due time “was manifest in the flesh^m.”

^a Phil. ii. 16.

^b Eph. iii. 9.

^c *ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς* must of necessity be so understood in other parts of this epistle; ii. 7, 24. and iii. 11.

^d Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

^e “Seeing and hearing” of the truth are applied to Christ, as well as to the Apostles. John iii. 11. with John viii. 26, 38.

^f Mark xvi. 16.

^g 1 John ii. 13, 14.

^h Rev. xix. 13.

ⁱ John xi. 25.

^k 1 John v. 20.

^l John i. 18.

^m 1 Tim. iii. 16.

And it was *his* existence that was so determinately denied by the heretics whom the Apostle wished to silence. He, too, not only had lived in closest intimacy with his disciples before his crucifixion, but, after his death and resurrection, had appeared to them for forty days; and, when they doubted whether it were *he*, or whether it were not a spirit whom they saw, he said to them, “*Handle* me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me haveⁿ.” Now, if we consider the Apostle as speaking personally of him, we can account for the vast variety of expressions tending to confirm the testimony which he bore respecting him: whereas, if we apply the expressions to the Gospel, the terms are multiplied far beyond what the occasion called for, and the metaphors are stronger than he could with propriety use. Besides, if we understand him as speaking of Christ personally, there is a remarkable coincidence between the beginning of this epistle of St. John, and the beginning of his Gospel. “In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” “In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” And “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us; and we behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father^o.”

But, whether we understand the expressions as relating to the Gospel of Christ, or to his person,]

It must of necessity be understood as declaring, that in Christ Jesus there is life, even eternal life—

[The Apostle testified of Christ, as he says in a subsequent chapter of this epistle: “We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world^p.” If we inquire more particularly what the substance of his testimony was, he informs us: “This is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.” “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life^q.”

Thus we see, in fact, that, whether we understand the passage as speaking of the Gospel, or of Christ himself, it comes to the same point. If the Gospel be spoken of, it is as revealing Christ: if Christ be spoken of, it is as revealed in the Gospel; or, in other words, as being “the way, the truth, and the life^r.”

Bear in mind then, that all that is spoken of Christ in the holy Gospels is true: the Apostles were ear-witnesses, and eye-witnesses, of it, even of all that they relate. “They did

ⁿ Luke xxiv. 39.

^o John i. 1—4, 14.

^p 1 John iv. 14.

^q 1 John v. 9, 11, 12.

^r John xiv. 6.

not follow cunningly-devised fables, when they made known the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty: for they were with him in the holy mount, when he received from God the Father honour and glory, and when there came to him a voice from the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased^s." Whether therefore they speak of his sufferings or his glory, their testimony may be relied on: and we may be sure that in Him is salvation, and in Him alone.]

The extreme urgency of the Apostle in commending to us his testimony, leads us to contemplate,

II. The benefit of receiving it—

The Apostles themselves were brought into a most exalted state through faith in this Divine Saviour—

["Hear what the Apostle speaks respecting it:" "Truly," says he, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." By the Lord Jesus Christ they were brought into a state of reconciliation with God; and were enabled to regard him in the endearing character of a Father. "Through Him too, and by the Holy Spirit, they had access to God^t" at all times, pouring out their hearts before him, making known to him their every want, and committing to him their every care. Through the same divine channel, God descended into their bosoms, revealing to them his will, communicating to them his grace, and shedding abroad in their hearts a sense of his love. Nay more, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost had come down and taken up their residence within them, dwelling in them as in a temple, and manifesting to them, as far as they were capable of beholding it, all the glory of the Godhead^u. From hence arose within them inconceivable peace and joy, which were to them an earnest and foretaste of their heavenly inheritance; for they "knew that Christ was in the Father, and in them also; and that they too were in him^x." Such had been their happy state from the first moment that they had believed in Christ; more sparingly indeed in the first instance, but progressively advancing as their knowledge of Christ became more intimate, and their affiance in him more entire.]

And we also, by the same faith, are brought to a participation of all the same privileges—

["These things," says the Apostle, "we declare unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us." And in what does

^s 2 Pet. i. 16—18.

^t Eph. ii. 18.

^u John xiv. 16—18, 21, 23.

^x John xiv. 20.

that fellowship consist, but in a participation of all the same privileges and blessings which they enjoyed? And this is indeed the portion of all who receive their testimony aright. All believers are brought into one family, of which Christ is the Head^y. The moment we believe, “we come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel^z.” Now here we see the whole family: here is God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ the mediator; here also are the angels who never sinned, and all the hosts of the redeemed in heaven, and all the saints that are still on earth: all are brought together into one family, and all have fellowship with each other as the head and the members of the same body: so that every individual believer now has the same fellowship with the Apostles, as they had with each other and with the prophets who had gone before them; and the same “fellowship too with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Does this appear too strong? It is not so strong as what our blessed Saviour himself has spoken upon the subject. For he not only declares to us, that “both He and his Father will come to us, and make their abode with us^a;” but he declared to his Father also, “I have given them the glory which thou gavest me, 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^b.” Here, I say, the union of the different members of his body is compared with the union which subsists between the different persons of the Godhead, than which nothing can be conceived so entire, so mysterious, so unchangeable.

Know ye, then, that this is the state into which you will be brought, if only you receive the testimony of God respecting his dear Son. Believe truly, that “in him is life,” and that through faith in him your souls shall live; and then all the fulness of these blessings shall be yours: nor shall even the beloved Apostle himself possess a blessing, of which you shall not, according to your capacity, partake with him.

And here let me say, that, if all the tautology which the Apostle makes use of in my text had been multiplied an hundred-fold, it would not have been too much for the occasion; since nothing can exceed the misery of those who reject this testimony, or the happiness of those who truly receive it.]

^y Eph. i. 10. and iii. 15.

^a John xiv. 23.

^z Heb. xii. 22—24.

^b John xvii. 21—23.

CONTEMPLATE now, I pray you, the object which the Apostle had in view in all these earnest solicitations—

["These things," says he, "I write unto you, that your joy may be full^c." It was for this end that our blessed Lord himself had so strongly and so continually inculcated them: "These things speak I in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves^d." And this is the object which I also would endeavour to attain. Beloved brethren, consider how unspeakable must be the joy of being brought into fellowship with the Apostles in all that they ever did, or ever shall, possess! All that access to God, all that intercourse with God, all that sense of Christ's incomprehensible love, all that enjoyment of his presence, and all that fruition of his glory! it is all yours by promise and by oath, if only you truly believe in Christ! O, put it not from you: defer not to seek it, yea, to seek it with your whole hearts! Then shall you know what it is to have a heaven upon earth: for, though now ye see not the Lord Jesus with your bodily eyes, yet shall you, by believing, be brought into such communion with him, that "your joy in him shall be unspeakable and glorified^e."]]

^c ver. 4.

^d John xvii. 13.

^e 1 Pet. i. 8.

MMCCCCXXXI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONFORMED TO GOD'S IMAGE.

1 John i. 5—7. *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

IN fulfilling the ministerial office, it is not sufficient that we set before our people the evidences of Christianity, or inculcate the performance of some moral duties: we are messengers from God to men; and we must "declare to them the message which we have received from him." We must not alter or conceal any part of that which we have been commanded to deliver; but must make known the whole counsel of God; and, having declared it with all

plainness and fidelity, must urge the acceptance of it with all the energy we possess.

We have a message then from God to you: we are commanded to open to you the Divine character, and to call you by the most impressive arguments to become conformed to his image. In discharging this duty we proceed to set before you,

I. The character of God—

The term “light,” in Scripture, has various acceptations; but there are two things which we shall notice as more particularly comprehended in it in the words before us. It is the property of light to discover all things; and it is perfectly pure and incapable of pollution: when therefore it is said, that “God is light,” we must understand it as designating,

1. His infinite knowledge—

[God is “a God of knowledge^a.” “There is no creature which is not manifest in his sight.” The transactions of darkness are not hid from him: he sees the adulterer, that avails himself of the darkness of the night to visit his guilty paramour. His eye is upon the thief, that lays his hand upon his neighbour’s property. He notices the fraudulent dealer, who sells by false weights and measures, or takes advantage of the purchaser’s ignorance to get rid of a bad commodity, and to exact of him a higher price than it is worth. Nor is it the actions only that God inspects; his eyes are not only on our ways, but on our very hearts. We are apt to think that “the thick clouds are a covering to him, so that he cannot see^b;” but “the darkness and light to him are both alike^c.” “He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins^d.” “He knows the things that come into our minds, every one of them^e.” “He weigheth our spirits^f,” and discerns the precise quantity of good or evil that there is in all our thoughts and desires: yea, “He knows the imaginations that we go about, even now, years before” the thoughts are distinctly formed in our hearts^g. Our inmost souls are as much open to his view, as the sacrifices were to the priest, when he had flayed them for the purpose of examining the flesh, and cut them open to inspect their inward parts^h. In short, “*with him is no darkness at all*.” “hell

^a 1 Sam. ii. 3. ^b Job xxii. 13, 14. ^c Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12.

^d Jer. xvii. 10. ^e Ezek. xi. 5. ^f Prov. xvi. 2.

^g Deut. xxxi. 21. ^h This is the idea suggested, Heb. iv. 13.

and destruction are before him; much more the hearts of the children of menⁱ.”]

2. His unspotted holiness—

[“Light” is perhaps the only thing which is incapable of being polluted; and therefore is peculiarly fit to represent the immaculate purity of God.

God is a holy Being; yea, “glorious in holiness,” as well as in every other perfection. “He hateth all the workers of iniquity:” “He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity^k,” without the utmost abhorrence of it. In this respect also, as well as in the former, “*there is no darkness at all in him:*” there is none *in his nature*; there is none *in his dispensations*.

Consider *his nature*: Which of his attributes has the smallest mixture of unholiness? His sovereignty is not a weak partiality, but a holy exertion of his will, according to his own determinate and eternal counsels. His justice is not a rigorous severity, but a holy regard to the honour of his broken law. His mercy is not a weak exercise of pity at the expense of justice and truth, but a holy display of his unbounded compassion, in a way that at the same time illustrates and magnifies all his other perfections.

Consider *his dispensations*: these, it is true, are oftentimes inscrutable to us; yet is he “righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works^l.” We are sometimes indeed ready, through unbelief, to question his wisdom and his goodness^m. When we see the wicked triumphing, and the righteous suffering under the accumulated trials of persecution from man and desertion from God, we are apt to be offended, and to ask, whether there be a God that ruleth in the earth? But in both these respects is his holiness expressly vindicated in the sacred writings: the martyrs that are now in glory, at the same time that they expostulate, as it were, with God on the subject of his forbearance towards their persecutors, address him as “holy and trueⁿ:” and David, when complaining bitterly of the dereliction that he suffered, takes especial care to acknowledge that, in the midst of all, his holiness is unimpeached; “O God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night-season I am not silent; *but thou art holy*^o.” When therefore we are not able to comprehend the reason of God’s dispensations, we must still confess, that though “clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne^p.”]

The next part of the message points out to us,

ⁱ Prov. xv. 11.

^k Hab. i. 13.

^l Ps. cxlv. 17.

^m Ps. lxxiii. 12—14.

ⁿ Rev. vi. 10.

^o Ps. xxii. 1—3.

^p Ps. xcvi. 2.

II. The necessity and benefit of a conformity to him—

The saints are said to be renewed after the Divine image: and it is worthy of particular observation, that the only two points in which this renovation is said to consist, are knowledge^q, and holiness^r. We see then from hence wherein that conformity, which we are to attain, consists: it consists in knowledge and in holiness, or, as my text expresses it, in “walking in the light as he is in the light:” *our minds must be enlightened with the knowledge of God’s truth; and our hearts must be purified in the performance of his will.*

Let us notice then,

1. The necessity of this conformity—

[Many will pretend to have communion with God, while they are ignorant of the salvation revealed in the Gospel, and living in the habitual indulgence of sin. But, while they thus “walk in darkness,” what “fellowship can they have with God?” What access can they have to him, when they do not so much as know the way of “access to him through the rent veil of the Redeemer’s flesh^s?” and what regard can they feel in their hearts towards him, while they are under the allowed dominion of worldly and carnal lusts? Their profession is a system of falsehood and hypocrisy: “they lie, and do not the truth:” they may work up themselves to ecstasies if they will; but they neither have, nor can have, any fellowship with God; for how “shall the throne of iniquity (or one in whom sin reigns) have fellowship with him^t?” “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness^u?”]

2. The benefit of this conformity—

[If a person be walking unfeignedly and progressively in the study of God’s will, and in obedience to it, he possesses two great and unspeakable benefits; namely, *communion with God*, and *acceptance before him*.

He has *communion with God*^x. God loves the humble, diligent, obedient servant: “He will come to him,” and “lift

^q Col. iii. 10.

^r Eph. iv. 24.

^s Heb. x. 19, 20.

^t Ps. xciv. 20.

^u 2 Cor. vi. 14.

^x The opposition between the 6th and 7th verses shews that ver. 7 does not relate to the communion of the saints with each other, but to their fellowship with God.

up the light of his countenance upon him," and "manifest himself to him as he does not unto the world." He will "shed abroad his love in his heart," and "give him a spirit of adoption, whereby he shall cry, Abba, Father." The person himself may not be very conversant with raptures: but, whether he be more or less sensible of God's favour to him, it is manifest that he has fellowship with God: his knowledge of the Gospel proves that God has taught him; and his experience of its sanctifying power proves that God has strengthened and supported him.

He has also *acceptance before God*: he is not like an unpardoned sinner: Jesus Christ has washed away his sins in the fountain of his blood; yea, every day, every hour, every moment, is he cleansing him from the pollution that adheres to his best services. This cleansing is a continued act of Christ^y: and through it the soul maintains its peace with God, and is regarded by God "without spot or blemish^z." Cleansed by Jesus from "the iniquity of his holy things," he is presented "faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy^a."

Such are the benefits of cleaving to Christ, and "walking as he walked:" and a life devoted to God is not so properly the means of obtaining these benefits, as it is *the evidence that we already possess them.*]

From this most instructive subject we may LEARN,

1. The connexion between *faith and works*—

[One man hopes to be saved by his works, while he disregards faith in Christ: another hopes that his faith will save him, though it never produce good works. But both of these deceive their own souls: for no man can do such works as the Gospel requires, unless he embrace the truths which it reveals: and, if he could do them, they would be utterly insufficient to justify him before God. On the other hand, "the faith that is without works, is dead:" and as it differs not from the faith of devils, so will it bring us no better portion than theirs. Knowledge is necessary to produce holiness; and holiness is necessary to evince that our knowledge is truly spiritual and saving. It is not by separating them from each other, but by uniting them together, that we are to "walk in the light as God is in the light."]

2. The connexion between *duty and happiness*—

[The greater part of the world expect happiness in the ways of sin: but God has warned us that there is "no peace to the wicked." There is no real happiness but in fellowship

^y "Cleanseth."

^z Eph. v. 26, 27.

^a Jude, ver. 24.

with God: and there is no fellowship with him, without a conformity to him. If then we would be happy in this world, we should be religious: we should study to know and do the will of God. Then we should be happy in sickness as well as in health, and in the prospect of death no less than in the midst of earthly enjoyments.]

3. The connexion between *grace and glory*—

[The saints in glory are called “saints in light;” and in order to partake of their inheritance, we must be “made meet for it^b.” An unregenerate sinner would not be happy, even if he were in heaven. There is a total difference of character between them that are saved and them that perish: those who are saved, love God, and delight in him, and make it the labour of their souls to glorify him: whereas they who perish, would, if they were able, pluck him from his throne: it would be glad tidings to them if they were informed that he exists no longer. Such precisely is the difference between saints and sinners in this world; the one find all their happiness in serving God; the other say in their hearts, “We wish there were no God.” Neither the one nor the other indeed attain the same *degree* of holiness or wickedness in this world that they will in the next: but in all other respects their characters will continue the same that they are in this life. If ever then we would have fellowship with God in heaven, we must begin it here: and, if ever we would dwell with him in the regions of everlasting light, we must now be “brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel^c,” and “walk henceforth as children of the light and of the day^d.”]

^b Col. i. 12.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^d Eph. v. 8.

MMCCCCXXXII.

CONFESSION NECESSARY TO FORGIVENESS.

1 John i. 8, 9. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us: if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

THESE words are rendered familiar to our ears by being read almost continually as introductory to the service of our Church. On this account they may appear perhaps the less interesting; though in reality they are, from that very circumstance, commended to us as deserving a more than ordinary

attention. The truths indeed which are contained in them are extremely plain and simple: but they are of infinite importance to every child of man, inasmuch as they declare *the pitiable condition of a self-applauding moralist, and the happy condition of a self-condemning penitent.* We shall consider the substance of them under these two heads:

Let us consider,

I. The pitiable condition of a self-applauding moralist—

Persons of a high moral character are too often classed with the Pharisees of old, whose leading feature was hypocrisy. But,

Moral characters are proper objects of our love—

[No one can doubt but that morality is highly estimable, even though it do not flow from those divine principles which give it its chief value in the sight of God. So at least St. Paul thought, when before the whole Jewish council he said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day^a.” In this assertion he spoke of his life previous to his conversion. In another place, speaking of the same period, he informs us, that he was, “as touching the righteousness of the law, blameless;” and, that he had justly considered this as “gain to him^b.” And such may morality well be considered, wherever it exists: it is a gain to the person himself, in that he is kept from many actual offences: it is a gain to all his neighbours, who cannot but feel a beneficial influence from such a life: and it is a gain to the whole world, as far as the light of such an example can extend. True it is, that when St. Paul fully understood the Gospel, he counted all his morality “but loss for Christ.” Yet this does not at all derogate from the intrinsic excellence of morality: and to speak of morality in the contemptuous and degrading terms which many religious persons, and not a few incautious ministers too, use in reference to it, is extremely erroneous and blameworthy, inasmuch as it tends to lessen men’s regard for moral virtue, and to render the Gospel itself odious as hostile to good works. I would that every disciple of Christ would consider the example of his Divine Master in reference to this very point; and not consider it only, but follow it. When the Rich Youth came to him, and was directed by him to keep the different commandments of the decalogue, he answered, “Master, all these have I observed from my youth.” Now I would

^a Acts xxiii. 1.

^b Phil. iii. 6, 7.

ask, What is the treatment which that young man would have experienced from the great mass of religious professors? I greatly fear that the general feeling towards him would have been that of contempt, rather than of love. But how did our blessed Lord and Saviour regard him? We are told, "Then Jesus beholding him, *loved* him^c." And this is the spirit we should manifest towards all who are observant of the Divine laws, though they may not possess that faith in Christ which would stamp a new character upon the whole of their conduct. In proportion as any man excels in the different branches of moral virtue, he ought to be held as an object of respect, esteem, and love.]

But when they trust in their morality, they deserve our pity—

[I do not suppose that any persons would affirm, that they never had sinned at all. I rather conceive, that the Apostle speaks of persons affirming, that they never had sinned *to such a degree as to deserve God's wrathful displeasure*. This, alas! is too often the effect of morality; that it causes men to overlook their manifold defects, and to be filled with self-complacency, when, if they had juster views of themselves, they would be bowed down rather with a sense of their own unworthiness.

Now such persons, how excellent soever they may be in other respects, are in a truly pitiable condition: for "they deceive themselves."

"They deceive themselves" in relation *to the extent of their attainments*. They do, in fact, say with the Rich Youth, "What lack I yet?" whilst "they lack *one* thing," even *that* very thing which is indispensable to their acceptance with God. Our Lord brought the young man to the test; and, by a command which he gave, tried him, whether God or the world were the higher in his esteem? It was a grief to the young man to renounce all hope of an interest in the Saviour; but he knew not how to part with his possessions; and therefore abandoned the Lord Jesus rather than them. So, if moralists were brought to the test, they would shew, and indeed they do continually shew, that the love of Christ is not dominant in their hearts, and that they have never seen him as that "pearl of great price, for which they are ready to part with all."

They deceive themselves also in relation *to their state before God*. They imagine that they do not deserve, and consequently are not in danger of, his wrath and indignation. Thus it was with the Apostle Paul before his conversion. Hear his own acknowledgment respecting it: "I was alive without the

law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died^d:" that is, before I understood the spirituality of the law, I thought my obedience to it so perfect that I was in no danger of condemnation for my offences against it: but when my eyes were opened to see the extent of its demands and the defects of my obedience, I saw at once that I was deservedly under a sentence of death and condemnation.

Thus it is with multitudes who are exemplary in their moral conduct: in the midst of all their confidence they deceive themselves; and whilst they take credit to themselves for being right in the sight of God, they shew, that they have never yet received "the truth as it is in Jesus," and that, consequently, "the truth is not in them."]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The happy condition of the self-condemning penitent—

The "confession" which characterizes a true penitent, of course is not to be understood of a *mere* acknowledgment, but an acknowledgment accompanied with suitable contrition, and with a humble faith in the Lord Jesus. It imports such a confession as was made by the high-priest on the great day of annual expiation, when he laid his hands on the scape-goat, and confessed *over him* all the sins of all the children of Israel, whilst all of those whose sins he so transferred were "*afflicting their souls* before God^e." I may add, that this confession implies also a forsaking of the sins so confessed; as it is said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy^f."

Now respecting all such penitents, I do not hesitate to say, that,

1. Whatsoever they need shall certainly be vouchsafed unto them—

[Two things the penitent panteth after; namely, the forgiveness of his sins, and the renovation of his soul after the Divine image. And, behold, these are the very things promised to him in our text: "If we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." How reviving to the contrite soul is such a declaration as this! Here is no limitation as to the number or heinousness of the

^d Rom. vii. 9. ^e Lev. xvi. 21, 29, 30. ^f Prov. xxviii. 13.

sins that may have been previously committed; nor any exception as to the measure of depravity which may have defiled the soul, or the degree of obduracy to which it may have attained. “Though our sins may have been as scarlet, or of a crimson dye, they shall all be washed away in the blood of Christ, and the soul become white as the driven snow^g.” “Clean water also shall be sprinkled on us, even the Holy Ghost in his sanctifying operations, to cleanse us from all our filthiness and from all our uncleanness. A new heart shall be given us, and a new spirit be put within us: and God, by the mighty working of his own power, will cause us “to walk in his judgments and to keep his statutes^h.” Here is all that the penitent can desire. The promises are perfectly commensurate with his necessities: and, “laying hold on these promises, he shall be able to cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of Godⁱ.”]

2. For this, those very perfections of the Deity which are most adverse to them, are pledged—

[If the penitent desire mercy, *Justice* frowns upon him, and demands judgment against him: and *Truth* requires, that all the threatenings which have been denounced against sin and sinners should be executed upon him. But, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, these perfections of the Deity are not only satisfied, but are converted into friends, yea, and made the strongest advocates for the penitent's salvation. What a wonderful declaration is this, that, “if we confess our sins, God is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins; and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!” That *mercy* should be displayed in forgiveness, we can easily imagine: but how can *justice*? and how can *truth*? when, as has been before observed, both these attributes demand the sinner's condemnation? The Gospel solves this difficulty: it declares to us, that the Lord Jesus Christ has undertaken for us, and become our Surety, and by his own obedience unto death has satisfied all the demands of law and justice, and obtained for us the promise of eternal life: so that, if only we believe in him, and come to God through him, we may plead, even upon the very ground of *justice* and of *truth*, that God will fulfil to us all that he has promised to the Lord Jesus in our behalf, and impart to us all the blessings which his only dear Son has purchased for us. Through this mysterious dispensation, the very *righteousness* of God is magnified in the exercise of mercy; and “God is *just*, whilst justifying the sinner that believes in Jesus^k.”

^g Isai. i. 18.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^h Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^k Rom. iii. 26.

How blessed is the condition of the penitent when viewed in this light! Every thing is secured to him that his necessities require! and every thing confirmed to him by the very *justice* and *faithfulness* of Jehovah! Wipe away thy tears, thou weeping penitent; and “put off thy sackcloth, and gird thee with gladness:” for God has here “given thee the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”]

Attend however to a few words of parting ADVICE—

1. Let your humiliation be deep and abiding—

[It can never be too deep: there is no measure of self-loathing or self-abhorrence that can exceed what the occasion calls for. Thou mayest heretofore have thought thyself so pure, that “thou hadst no sin” which could subject thee to the wrath of God. Now thou knowest, that “the bed was too short for thee to stretch thyself upon, and the covering too narrow for thee to wrap thyself in¹.” “The pillows are plucked from thy arms;” and “the untempered mortar with which thou daubedst thy wall, adheres no longer^m.” You have now learned to estimate your character by another standard. You see now your *defects*. You compare your obedience, not with the mere letter, but with the spirit of the law: and from this view of your past life you know your just desert, and are convinced that the very best action, word, or thought of your whole life, if tried by the standard of God’s holy law, would plunge you into merited and everlasting perdition. And so it is at this very moment, notwithstanding your change of character. You could no more bear the scrutiny of that perfect law, than you could in your days of unregeneracy. Let this thought never be forgotten: let it abide with you day and night. Job, before that God had appeared unto him, said, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn meⁿ:” and after he had beheld God in his majesty and glory, his humiliation, so far from being removed, was deepened: and he exclaimed, “Behold, I am vile: I repent therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes^o.” So let your increase both in grace and peace be marked by a proportionable increase in humiliation and contrition.]

2. Let your affiance in God be simple and uniform—

[Never for a moment entertain a thought of any worthiness in yourself, or suffer any thing to be blended with your faith in Christ. Rely on him as entirely as if your whole life had been a scene of the most enormous wickedness. Renounce

¹ Isai. xxviii. 20.

ⁿ Job ix. 20.

^m Ezek. xiii. 10—20.

^o Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.

entirely every thing of your own in point of dependence; and seek to “be found in Christ, not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God through faith in him.” And let this abide with you to your latest hour. Let neither a relapse into sin deter you from coming thus to Christ; nor the most spotless continuance in holiness render such a mode of coming to him unnecessary in your eyes. This is the way in which you *may* come, however aggravated may have been your guilt; and this is the way in which you *must* come, however eminent your attainments. It is not possible for you to be too much on your guard against either doubting the sufficiency of Christ to save you, or attempting to unite any thing with him as a joint ground of your hope. To err in either of these respects will be fatal: it will arm both justice and truth against you, and will make void all that the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for you. But rely simply and altogether upon him, and “you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end.”]

MMCCCXXXIII.

THE ADVOCACY AND ATONEMENT OF CHRIST.

1 John ii. 1, 2. *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

THERE are two extremes to which men are apt to incline, namely, presumption and despair; and against both of these the Gospel is designed to guard us. The ungodly world at large imagine that God will never execute his threatened judgments: and some will take occasion even from the Gospel itself to expect impunity in the ways of sin. But the rich promises of the Gospel were never given for this end: it was never God's design that his “grace should be turned into licentiousness;” and therefore the Apostle affectionately warns us against such an abuse of it; “My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not.” On the other hand, there are some persons, who, from a sense of their manifold backslidings, are ready to despond. To these the Apostle proceeds to speak: he sets before them the offices which Christ sustains on the behalf of

sinner; and encourages them under every fresh contracted guilt to look unto him as a willing, suitable, and all-sufficient Saviour.

To further this good work in your hearts, we will shew,

I. The offices of Christ—

It will be proper to notice first that which is last mentioned in the text—

He is a “Propitiation for sin”—

[To understand what is meant by this, we should consider the state of man. We were fallen creatures, and, in consequence of our fall, obnoxious to the wrath of God. To restore ourselves to the Divine favour was impossible, because we could not offer any atonement for the sins we had committed. God, though ready to forgive, could not exercise mercy towards us in any way which did not accord with his justice, holiness, and truth. Christ therefore undertook to make satisfaction to the Divine justice, so that “mercy and truth might meet together, and righteousness and peace might kiss each other.” This he did by substituting himself in our place. “He bore our sins in his own body on the tree^a,” and “suffered, the just for the unjust^b.” Our apprehension of this matter will be greatly assisted, if we consider how it was represented under the Mosaic economy. Bulls, goats, and lambs were offered in sacrifice to God. The offender, when he brought his sacrifice, laid his hands upon its head, and transferred to it his guilt; and then it was put to death in his stead. This sacrifice God accepted on behalf of the offerer, and, out of respect to it, forgave his iniquities^c. This indeed was only a type: but it shadowed forth what was really done by Christ, who “came to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself^d.” The whole language of Scripture accords with this explanation, and confirms the truth of this stupendous mystery^e.]

He is also our “Advocate with the Father”—

^a 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^b 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^c Lev. i. 2, 4.

^d Heb. ix. 26.

^e Eph. v. 2. Rom. iii. 25. In this latter passage, as also in the text, the word which we translate “propitiation,” is the same as is elsewhere translated, “mercy-seat.” Compare Heb. ix. 5. But the illustration above given, is that which the scope of the passage evidently requires; and to explain the word in reference to the mercy-seat, would, *in this place*, only embarrass and obscure the sense.

[The office of an advocate is to appear for his client in a court of justice, and to plead his cause. Now this office also the Lord Jesus Christ executes in behalf of his people: He is gone up to the court of heaven, where “he appears in the presence of God for us^f.” The Holy Spirit also is our advocate: but there is a very wide difference between the advocacy of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit intercedes *in* us at the throne of *grace*; Christ intercedes *for* us at the throne of *glory*: the Spirit assists us to pray according to the will of God; Christ presents those prayers unto the Father, and renders them acceptable in his sight.

Now it was this advocacy of Christ which the Apostle had primarily in his view: and what he added respecting him as a propitiation for sin, was a subordinate subject, introduced to shew *the ground of his intercession*, and *the reason of its efficacy*. It will be proper therefore to notice more particularly the connexion between these offices, and *the dependence of the one upon the other*.

If we could conceive that Jesus had undertaken to be our advocate, and yet had made no atonement for sin, his advocacy would have been altogether in vain: for, what plea could he have found? he could not have denied, or extenuated, our guilt: nor could he have promised that we should ever make compensation for what we had done amiss. His mouth therefore must have been shut as well as ours. But, having offered himself a sacrifice for our sins, he has an adequate and effectual plea for all who trust in him. Are they accused by their great adversary? yea, does God himself testify against them? “True, he will say, they are sinners, that deserve thy wrathful indignation: but behold the wounds in my hands, my feet, my side; these I endured for them; by these I expiated their guilt; yea, I gave my own life a ransom for them; and therefore deliver them from going down into the pit: I have satisfied the demands both of law and justice on their behalf, and on this account I look, not to thy mercy only, but to thy justice and thy faithfulness to forgive them^g: out of respect to me, “thou mayest be just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe^h.”]

This view of his offices will naturally lead us to consider,

II. The comfort to be derived from them under every fresh-contracted guilt—

That we may speak more perspicuously on this subject, we shall notice

^f Job xxxiii. 24.

^g 1 John i. 9.

^h Rom. iii. 26.

1. The sensations which a view of those offices will produce—

Hope, joy, and peace, arise in succession to crown the exercise of faith. Till we are enabled to behold the crucified and exalted Saviour, we droop, and question the possibility of our acceptance with God; but when we are enabled to believe in him, our fears are dissipated; our sorrows are turned into joy and exultation; and, after a season, the livelier motion of our affections, which was occasioned by the greatness and suddenness of the change, subsides into a solid and abiding peace. This is the order marked out both by Prophetsⁱ and Apostles^k, and experienced by all who live by faith on the Son of God.]

2. The suitability of those offices to produce them—

[The intercessions of sinful men have often availed for the benefit of those for whom they were offered: but Christ is a “righteous” advocate, who, having no sins of his own to obstruct his access to God, may come with boldness into his presence, and with a certainty of acceptance. Besides, he is ever “with the Father,” ready to offer his intercessions the very moment that he sees any danger of a breach between him and us. Moreover he is the “Christ,” whom the Father *anointed* to this very office. It was the duty of the high-priest, not only to offer sacrifice, but to carry the blood of the sacrifice within the vail, and to burn incense before the mercy-seat: thus the office of intercession belongs to Jesus no less than that of offering an oblation: and consequently we have in his appointment to this office a pledge that he shall not intercede in vain.

The consolations arising from this office are heightened and confirmed by the consideration of his atonement: for in his one offering of himself there is a sufficiency of merit to justify all that shall believe in him. His death was a propitiation, not for the sins of a few only, “but for the sins of the whole world;” so that if all the sins that ever were committed from the foundation of the world, or ever shall be committed as long as the world shall stand, had been committed by any single individual, he would have no reason to despair; since if only he believed in Jesus, they should all be blotted out even as a morning cloud.

What marvellous truths are these! What a foundation for hope, and joy, and peace! O that our meditations on them might be sweet, and that our souls might ever experience their refreshing influence!]

ⁱ Isai. lv. 12.

^k Rom. xv. 13.

ADDRESS—

1. The self-righteous—

[What ground is here afforded for looking to our own repentances or reformations, as though they could restore us to the Divine favour? We deny not the necessity or importance of these things; but we utterly deny their efficacy to save the soul. There is no Saviour but Christ: if *any* man sin, however exemplary he may have been on the whole, he must trust in the atonement and intercession of Christ: there is no distinction between one sinner and another: all must equally depend on Christ: all must enter at that door¹: all must build on that foundation^m: all must be saved by the name of Christ, and by that onlyⁿ.]

2. The contrite—

[Let not the greatness of your guilt dismay you. Remember Abraham's intercession for the cities of the plain^o, and that of Moses for the Israelites, when God forbid him, as it were, to pray for them^p. Yet neither Abraham nor Moses had redeemed their souls. But Jesus is our propitiation, as well as our advocate; and shall not HE prevail? See how he prevailed for Peter, who, if the Saviour had not interceded for him, would most probably have hanged himself in despair, as Judas did: but Christ said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:" and in answer to this prayer, he was restored both to his apostleship and to the favour of his God. Thus effectual shall the Saviour's intercession be for you. Consider *in what manner* he intercedes for you: when he prayed for *himself* in his extremity, he said, "Father, *not as I will*, but as thou wilt:" but in his intercession for you he says, "Father, *I will* that they whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Doubt not then, but that he "will pray the Father for you;" and that the Father, who has for so many thousands of years had respect to the bow in the clouds, and has forborne to deluge the earth again, will much more have respect to the Son of his love, and fulfil to your soul the promises of his grace.]

¹ John x. 9.^m 1 Cor. iii. 11.ⁿ Acts iv. 12.^o Gen. xviii. 23—32.^p Exod. xxxii. 9—14.

MMCCCCXXXIV.

THE TRUE TEST OF LOVE TO GOD.

1 John ii. 3—5. *Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*

THERE are many who imagine, that to enforce an observance of God's commandments, and to insist on obedience as an evidence of our faith, is *legal*. But the whole tenour of the Gospel shews, that our interest in it must be productive of holiness, since "faith without works is dead." In fact, there is no certain test whereby to try our faith in Christ, but our obedience to his commands. Of this the Apostle testifies plainly in my text: from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. That it is the Christian's privilege to be fully assured of his acceptance with God—

The generality of persons conceive this to be impossible; and account the very idea to be presumptuous in the extreme. I will readily grant, that there are many who deceive themselves in relation to this matter: but still I cannot admit, that the unfounded confidence of hypocrites is any just ground for concluding that the upright may not know their state before God. Those who deceive themselves do not judge by a right test; and therefore it is that they are deceived: only let any one apply to himself the test which is prescribed in my text, and he need not fear but that the trial shall issue in a clear discovery of his state.

The whole Scriptures attest, that men may "*know*" their acceptance with God—

[In the Old Testament, David confidently asserts, "O God, thou art my God^a." And the Bride, in the book of Canticles, with equal assurance, exclaims, "My beloved is

^a Ps. lxiii. 1.

mine; and I am his^b." Under the New-Testament dispensation this privilege is yet more extensively enjoyed. St. John, writing to the whole Christian Church, says, in the third chapter of this epistle, "We *know* that we have passed from death unto life:" "We *know* that we are of the truth, and may assure our hearts before him:" "We *know* that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us^c." In the fourth chapter he renews the same subject; saying, "We *know* that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit^d." And in the last chapter he asserts the same, in a direct contrast with all the world besides: "We *know* that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. We *know* that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true: and we are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ^e." Nor is there a real Christian in the universe who is not entitled to say with St. Paul, "I live; yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*^f."]

The enjoyment of this privilege is at the root of all the believer's comfort—

[It is in order to the Christian's enjoyment of this assurance, that the Holy Spirit is given to him as "a Spirit of adoption, that he may cry to God, Abba, Father;" and as "a witness to assure his conscience that he is a child of God^g." And it is altogether owing to this internal persuasion of his acceptance with God, that the believer can look forward with confidence to his future state in glory: "We *know*, that when our earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Therefore in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; since, being clothed, we shall not be found naked^h." It is under the same conviction, also, that the Christian, even now in the midst of all his conflicts, is enabled to triumph over all his enemies; assured that none of them, nor all together, "shall ever separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lordⁱ."]

Of course, you will all be anxious to know,

II. How this assurance is to be obtained—

It is not the fruit of any enthusiastic impression or conceit.

^b Cant. ii. 16.

^c 1 John iii. 14, 19, 24.

^d 1 John iv. 13.

^e 1 John v. 19, 20.

^f Gal. ii. 20.

^g Rom. viii. 15, 16.

^h 2 Cor. v. 1—3.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 34—39.

I do not deny, but that many “profess that they know God, whilst in works they deny him^k ;” and that it is possible for men so to deceive themselves, as to possess all the confidence of the most established believer: yea, there are not wanting multitudes who carry this delusion with them even to the bar of judgment; and, even in the presence of their Judge, will claim his favour; saying, “Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?” whilst they will only draw upon themselves that damnatory sentence, “Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity^l.” If any would attain a scriptural assurance, they must try themselves by the test proposed to them by St. John—the test of their obedience to God’s commands.

This is a *suitable* way of attaining it—

[How do we judge of a tree, but by its fruits? We should not be satisfied with beholding its foliage, however luxuriant it might be: we should desire to behold, and to taste, the fruit: and by that we should form our estimate of its real worth. In like manner, if a child or servant professed pre-eminent regard for us, we should naturally expect that regard to manifest itself by an observance of our commands. This, then, is the way by which God will judge of us, and by which we also must judge ourselves. Our Lord has plainly told us, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me^m :” and again; “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruitⁿ.” Well, therefore, may our Lord accuse us of inconsistency, when we profess ourselves his, without obeying his commandments: “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say^o?” We may set this down as an unquestionable truth, that if “Christ be made unto us righteousness, he will be to us sanctification also^p.” And if we say, “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” we must never forget the description there given of those persons; namely, that “they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit^q.”]

It is also a *certain* way of attaining it—

[From whence is it that any person is enabled to keep God’s commandments? Our blessed Lord has told us that

^k Tit. i. 16.

^l Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^m John xiv. 21.

ⁿ John xv. 5.

^o Luke vi. 46.

^p 1 Cor. i. 30.

^q Rom. viii. 1.

“without him we can do nothing.” It is by its union with the vine, that a branch bears its fruit: and it is only by union with the Lord Jesus that we also can have a sufficiency for any thing that is good^r. Have we then a clear evidence that we are bringing forth fruit to God? it is manifest that we are united to Christ: or, as my text expresses it, “Hereby know we that we are in him.” From hence, also, we know that we are in favour with God: for, to what end has God loved us, and shed abroad his love in our hearts, but that we might “by that love be constrained to live unto Him who died for us^s.” It is by our obedience that God’s love is perfected in us;” for by that obedience its end is answered, its power is evinced, its operation is augmented: so that, as “by works our faith is made perfect^t,” so, by works, God’s love to us, and ours to him, are also perfected. I add yet further, that by obedience our right to heaven is ascertained: for it is written, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates of the city^u. Of course, it is not on the ground of *merit* that they acquire this right, but solely on the ground of God’s gracious promises to those who believe in Christ. Nevertheless, this evidence is indispensably necessary to the believer; and on the production of that shall his title to heaven be acknowledged^x: for “Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all them that *obey* him^y.”]

Who does not SEE, in this subject,

1. The importance of self-examination?

[It is evidently taken for granted, in my text, that some self-deceivers will be found, who will “say, that they know Christ, whilst yet they keep not his commandments.” And what shall I say to *them*? What can I say more, than what God himself speaks to them in my text, “That they are liars; and that the truth is not in them?” I grant that this sounds harsh; but it is the declaration of our God: and I dare not to soften or conceal what he hath spoken. In many other passages does this loving Apostle use the same language^z; and I entreat you, brethren, to lay it to heart. Be assured, that, whilst you continue under this delusion, “the truth is not in you:” the Gospel has not yet wrought effectually on your hearts, nor are you possessed of real integrity in your souls. No, indeed, you are “liars” and hypocrites, and must take your portion with such characters in the eternal world. Tell me, then, whether it do not become you to “examine

^r John xv. 4.

^s 2 Cor. v. 14.

^t Jam. ii. 22.

^u Rev. xxii. 14.

^x Matt. vii. 21.

^y Heb. v. 9.

^z 1 John i. 6. iv. 20. and v. 10.

yourselves," and to try your faith^a by this standard? Do not imagine that the knowledge here spoken of is a speculative acquaintance with divine truth: no; it is such a knowledge as both justifies^b and sanctifies^c the soul; it is that knowledge in comparison of which St. Paul "accounted all things as dung and dross^d." This is the knowledge which you must possess: and if you will think you have it, whilst your life and conversation give the lie to your profession, your doom is fixed: for thus saith God, by the Prophet Hosea: "Israel saith, my God, *we know thee*: Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him^e:" yea, "every such person shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the glory of his power, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that *know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ^f*." I say, then, to every one of you, "Examine whether ye be in the faith, and prove your own selves^g."]]

2. The blessedness of practical Christianity?

[To what a glorious state does true religion raise us! Men in all ages have accounted the Virgin Mother of our Lord blessed, because she was God's chosen vessel, to bring into the world the Lord of Glory. But I speak not too strongly, if I say, that the practical Christian is yet more highly honoured, and more truly blessed, than she, so far as her external relation to him was concerned: for our Lord, in answer to one who had congratulated her on her distinguished honours, saying, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked," replied, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it^h." True, indeed, such persons may not always possess a full assurance of their interest in Christ: God may, for wise reasons, permit their minds to be agitated with doubts and fears; and Satan may, for a season, greatly harass and distress them. But, whilst they walk in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto them; yea, he has authorized his servants to address them in these encouraging words: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his Godⁱ. Yes, brethren, if only you are conscientiously endeavouring to approve yourselves to God in a holy and unreserved obedience, you need not fear. This very disposition emanates from God: it is itself a fruit and

^a Job xx. 4—7.

^d Phil. iii. 8.

^g 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

ⁱ Isai. l. 10.

^b Isai. liii. 11.

^e Hos. viii. 2, 3.

^h Luke viii. 20, 21. and xi. 27, 28.

^c John xvii. 17.

^f 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

evidence of his love; and it shall assuredly issue in everlasting felicity: for, as sure as God is true, "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart^k."]]

^k Ps. xcvi. 11.

MMCCCCXXXV.

CHRIST AN EXAMPLE TO HIS FOLLOWERS.

1 John ii. 6. *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*

AMONG the various excellencies which distinguish Christianity from all other religions, one of very considerable importance is, that the Author of it condescended to exemplify in his own person every thing which it required of its most faithful adherents. Different philosophers established rules for their followers: but no one ever professed himself a pattern, and much less a perfect pattern, of all that under any circumstances could be required of him. But the Lord Jesus Christ has perfectly fulfilled his own law, as for other ends, so also that he might "set us an example to follow his steps." True it is indeed that He is the sole Author of our salvation from first to last: but he does not on that account dispense with our obedience to his law: on the contrary, he says, that "all who abide in him, must walk as he walked."

There are some who deny that the law is to the believer a rule of life. But supposing this error could not be refuted by *direct* testimony, which it easily and abundantly may, what would the advocates of it gain, if once they admitted, what I suppose no man would deny, that Christ is an example for us to follow? Did not he "fulfil all righteousness," even to the utmost extent of the moral law? And if he did, and is an example to us, must not we obey the law in the same manner, and to the same extent? We are not indeed to fulfil it *for the same ends*; because he alone, *as the Mediator* between God and man, can save men by his obedience unto death. but

in all that he did *as a man*, we are to follow his steps: and if we neglect to do so, we shew, that we have no part or lot in his salvation.

The words I have read will lead me to set before you the principles, and the practice, of every true Christian.

I. His principles—

The Christian is united unto Christ by faith, as a branch to the vine; and his one great concern is to “abide in Christ.”

For this he labours as the one ground of his hope—

[He knows that he has nothing, and can have nothing, in himself. He needs no one to tell him this: he has learned it, as from the inspired volume, so also from his own experience. He has found on numberless occasions how weak and sinful a creature he is: and is well assured, that, if he had not “Jehovah himself for his righteousness and strength,” it would be impossible for him ever to be saved. Hence he views with complacency the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Head of the Church. “It has pleased the Father, that in Christ should all fulness dwell^a :” and in this respect he is altogether like-minded with the Father: for it pleases him in his inmost soul to have such a Head of vital influence, and such a Depository of all spiritual blessings. He is sensible that the branch derives all its life and fertility from its union with the vine: and that, if once separated from the stem, it would wither and die^b. This idea he endeavours to realize: and “the life which he lives in the flesh, he lives altogether by faith in the Son of God^c,” “receiving out of his fulness^d” a constant supply of grace and peace. If, as a blind and ignorant creature, he need wisdom; or as a guilty creature, he need righteousness; or as a polluted creature, he need sanctification; or as an enslaved creature, he need redemption: he looks for it all in Christ, whom he regards as furnished with all for the use of his Church, and as empowered to communicate it all to every one that trusts in him^e.]

In this he glories as his most exalted privilege—

[Humiliating as this life of dependence at first sight appears, he considers it as his highest honour, and as raising him even above Adam in Paradise. Adam, when in Paradise, was

^a Col. i. 19.

^b John xv. 1—5.

^c Gal. ii. 21.

^d John i. 16.

^e 1 Cor. i. 30.

indeed perfect: but to him was committed the task of working out a righteousness for himself, and of maintaining by his own inherent powers his steadfastness in the divine life. And hence he fell, and died, and involved both himself and all his posterity in ruin. But the believer has a righteousness wrought out for him by his incarnate God; and "his life," instead of being committed to his own keeping, "is hid with Christ in God," where Satan cannot reach it; and therefore, since Christ has engaged that none shall ever pluck out of his hands those whom the Father hath committed to him, he shall endure unto the end: and, "when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, shall assuredly appear with him in glory^f." Thus, in respect both of honour and security, is the believer elevated even above Adam himself; since he has not a creature-righteousness wherein to stand before God, or a created power to uphold him; but a righteousness that is divine, and an arm that is omnipotent. To form a right judgment of his state, we must attend to what our blessed Lord himself has spoken on this subject. Indeed his words are so strong, that no man would dare to utter them if not warranted by his authority. What would you say, if I were to affirm, that the life of faith resembles the very life which the Lord Jesus Christ lived when on earth; and that the believer has the same dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, as Christ himself, during his incarnate state, had on the Father; and the same security in him too; would you not be almost ready to shut your ears, and to accuse the preacher of blasphemy? Yet is this what we are authorized by Christ himself to declare. Hear his own words: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. *As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, even so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me^g.*" Say, beloved, is not here a ground of glorying? and, if the believer did not glory in this privilege, would not the very stones cry out against him?]

Whilst with confidence we affirm these to be the Christian's principles, we with no less confidence proceed to declare,

II. His practice—

It is thought by many that a life of faith is unfriendly to morality; since if all our righteousness is in Him, what need have we of any of our own? and, if he be engaged to keep us, what need have we of any care or watchfulness to keep ourselves? But

this reasoning is altogether fallacious: since every one who by faith abides in Christ, acknowledges it his bounden duty to “walk as he walked.”

He acknowledges it, I say, as his bounden duty—

[He does not conceive of Christ as liberating him from the obligations of morality: for though he is free from the law *as a covenant*, he is not free from it, nor would wish to be freed from it, *as a rule of life*. He considers himself as “not without law, but under the law to Christ.” Were he permitted to violate the commands of God, he would account it a curse rather than a privilege. Such a liberty would appear to him only like a permission to drink poison, which, however sweet to the taste, would prove “the gall of asps within him.” So far from imagining himself freed from the restraints of the law, he considers all that Christ has done for him as laying him under ten-fold obligations to holiness both of heart and life. His motives to obedience are changed indeed: but his obligations to it are not a whit diminished, yea, rather, are greatly heightened; because he well knows, that the very end for which his Saviour died was, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”]

He makes it his constant and determined aim—

[The true believer is not a mere follower of Christ, but an imitator also^h: and it is his delight to set the Saviour before him as his great Exemplar. When he sees how entirely the soul of Jesus was wrapped up in his work, and that it was “his meat and drink to do his Father’s will,” he pants, and sighs, and with shame and sorrow of heart exclaims, O that there were “in me the mind that was in Christ Jesus!” When he beholds the ardour of Christ’s love to man, his unwearied labours, his patient sufferings, his exertions in every possible way, he girds up his loins, and follows the footsteps of his Lord; and though he knows that he can never attain to his perfection, yet he proposes to himself no object short of that, and strives to be “holy as he was holy,” and “perfect as he was perfect:” nor does the glory of heaven itself appear more desirable in his eyes, than does a conformity to the Saviour’s image in righteousness and true holiness. In a peculiar manner, he notices the tempers of his Divine Master; his meekness, his patience, his forbearance, his love to enemies, his compassion even to his very murderers: he sees what a fallen creature he himself is, and he cries mightily to God for grace and strength, that he may be enabled to mortify every

^h 1 Cor. xi. 1. the Greek.

feeling that is opposite to love, and to “purify himself even as his Lord and Master was pureⁱ.”]

Now as this subject gives us a deep insight into the whole of the Gospel system, I will embrace this opportunity,

1. Of establishing the principles of those who are in doubt—

[The Christian world has been much divided on the subject of faith and works: and we may easily conceive that some, who are well affected towards the Gospel, may feel a doubt, whether in our statements of the truth we do not elevate faith too high, and sink morality below its proper level. But the text, I conceive, will settle this point at once. I grant, that they who require good works in whole or in part to justify us before God, do *in appearance* shew a high sense of their value: and that they who decry them in this point of view, and declare that such a dependence on them will invalidate the whole Gospel, and sink us into perdition, do *in appearance* betray an indifference towards them. But I would ask, Does any advocate for the merit of good works ever propose to himself so high a standard as that in my text? and, if any one inculcate the necessity of walking to the very uttermost as Christ walked, do they not account him “righteous overmuch?” Yes assuredly, they always have a lower standard than that which is proposed to them in the Gospel. On the other hand, they who exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and live by faith on him, will admit of no rule of conduct which does not embrace the whole law, and lead to a perfect conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. And hence it is, that the followers of Christ are as much condemned for their unnecessary zeal and strictness, as for the *supposed* licentiousness of their principles. Here then the point is brought to the very test, which the advocates of human merit *profess* to approve. Let the two opposite systems be tried by this touchstone; ‘Which requires of its votaries the sublimer and more enlarged morality?’ and we consent, that this issue, fairly tried, shall determine the point for ever. They who live in any measure of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, will walk as *the world* walketh; but they who abide in Christ as their only hope, will with all their might endeavour to walk as Christ walked.]

2. Of directing the energies of those who have embraced the Gospel—

[Be not faint or weary in well-doing: but set the Lord ever before you, and endeavour to resemble him in the whole

ⁱ 1 John iii. 3.

“ spirit of his *mind*,” and the whole course of his *conduct*. Of course, what he spake as the Great Prophet of the Church, or did as the Redeemer of the world, was peculiar to himself, and can be no pattern for us: but in all that he either spake or did as man, we are to follow him without reserve. If we propose to ourselves any lower standard, or except any one of God’s commandments from our rule of duty, we are not Christ’s disciples. See what is said in our text, “ He that saith he abideth in him, *ought* himself also so to walk, even as he walked:” and again in the following chapter: “ Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him^k.” Here then you see what all your profession of faith will amount to, if it do not approve itself by its fruits: it will be a self-delusion, and a lie altogether. Come then, beloved, and address yourselves to your high and heavenly work. Ye see your calling: O strive to “ walk worthy of it!” yea, “ worthy of the Lord,” whose you are, and whom you profess to serve. Thus will you vindicate the Gospel from the charges which ignorant and ungodly men bring against it; and will prove to all around you that it is indeed “ the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation.”]

^k 1 John iii. 6. See also 1 John ii. 4.

MMCCCCXXXVI.

THE TRUE LIGHT.

1 John ii. 8. *The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.*

OUR blessed Lord is supposed by many to have enlarged the demands of the moral law. That he speaks of giving a new commandment is certain: “ A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another^a.” St. John also speaks to the same effect in the words before my text; though, in the words immediately preceding, he had declared, that it was not a new commandment. The reconciling of this difficulty will suggest the true explanation of our text. The command given us to love our neighbour as ourselves, was *not* a new commandment. It was a part of the moral law^b; and of the law originally

^a John xiii. 34.

^b Lev. xix. 18.

written on the heart of man in Paradise. Yet in some respects it *was* a new law: both as it respected the Lord Jesus who enacted it, and as it respected us on whom it was enjoined. Let us hear what the Apostle himself says: “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you: *which thing is true in him, and in you.*” It was new *as it respected the Lord Jesus Christ*, who had proposed his own conduct as the model (which, of course, it could not be, till he himself had completed his work on earth), and had enforced it with his own authority as Mediator, which also must be subsequent to his entrance on the mediatorial office. And it was new also *as it respected us*, because it was never before conceived to extend to the “laying down of our lives for the brethren^c,” and because it was enjoined with new motives, such as could never have existed before, even the testifying of our love to Christ, “who has loved us, and given himself for us.” Previous to the coming of our Lord, a veil of obscurity hanged over these things: but now they were made clear, “*because the darkness was past, and the true light now shined.*”

In considering the change which is here spoken of, I shall notice it,

I. As verified at that day—

The darkness of the Mosaic dispensation was then dispelled—

[That was a dark and shadowy dispensation altogether. God himself was not made known by it as the common Father of all, but as the friend only of one peculiar people, whom he favoured above all others. The way of acceptance with him was very indistinctly seen in the sacrifices which were offered; there being but little spoken to direct the attention of the offerers to that great Sacrifice, from whence alone they derived all their efficacy. Nor were the requirements of the moral law

by any means clearly revealed; the very commandments themselves consisting only of *prohibitions*, and those prohibitions extending, for the most part, only to *overt acts*. Hence Paul himself, educated as he was by the first master of his day, and pre-eminently conversant as he was with the Mosaic writings, did not, till his eyes were opened by the Spirit of God, understand the *spiritual* import of the law, or the extent of the command, "Thou shalt not covet^d." Besides, there were many enactments for the direction of magistrates in the administration of justice, which, when erroneously construed as rules of duty in private life, seemed to authorize revenge; as, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

But our blessed Lord threw the true light on the whole of that economy. He declared plainly, that he was "come to fulfil the law," and "to give his life a ransom for many." He directed the people to look to *him* as "*the way*, by which alone any one could come to the Father; as *the truth*," in whom all the types and shadows of the law were realized; and "as the life," by whom alone any sinner in the universe could live^e. He explained also the moral law, and freed it from all the glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees, by which it had been obscured; declaring, that it extended to the thoughts and desires of the heart, no less than to the overt act. In particular he made known the great duty of *love*, as comprehending the whole law in all its branches, and in its utmost extent. Thus in relation both to doctrine and morals it might be truly said, that "the darkness was past, and the true light then shined."]

The darkness was also dispelled from their minds—

[All by nature are in darkness; and, even though the light shines around them, they are not able to apprehend it; "the eyes of their understanding being altogether darkened." Of all whilst in a state of unbelief it is expressly said, that "the God of this world hath blinded their eyes^f." But by the Gospel, accompanied with power from on high, they had been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^g." They now acknowledged Jesus as their Saviour; and had obtained "reconciliation with God through the blood of his cross." They had now an insight into that stupendous mystery, which all "the angels in heaven are desiring to look into," the redemption of the world by the sacrifice of our incarnate God; and, together with that, had acquired just views of the state in which a redeemed sinner ought to live. In a word, they had been "brought out of

^d Rom. vii. 7, 9.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^e John xiv. 6.

^g Acts xxvi. 18.

darkness into marvellous light^h." So that they were able to appreciate the necessity and the excellency of the commandment which was now enjoined.]

But let us contemplate this glorious change,

II. As fulfilled also amongst ourselves—

Certainly, the true light does shine among you—

[The Lord Jesus "Christ is fully preached among you." His person, his work, his offices are set before you. You have seen from time to time the types, as completed in their great Antitype; and the prophecies, as fulfilled in him to whom they had respect, even "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." The covenant of grace, which was made with him in our behalf, has been opened to you, and all the great and precious promises that are contained in it unfolded to your view. Salvation, in all its freeness, and in all its fulness, has been offered to you; and all the perfections of God, as pledged for your encouragement, have been brought in review before you. Nor has the nature of evangelical obedience been either partially or sparingly declared. The distinction between *the letter* and *the spirit* of the law has been copiously displayed; and all the high requirements of the Gospel been made known; and not declared only, but enforced also by every species of argument that could address itself to your understanding, your conscience, or your will. I say not, that these things have been so fully manifested as they ought to have been, or might have been: because, if my own views had been more enlarged, and my own soul been more deeply impressed with these things, my ministrations would no doubt have been more luminous and beneficial: but this I can say, that I have "not knowingly withheld any thing that could be profitable unto you;" nor, according to the measure of light and grace given unto me, "have I shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of Godⁱ." In this respect therefore I may say, that, if at any time there have been darkness here, that darkness is past: and the true light shines among you, in such a degree, at least, as is sufficient to "guide all your feet into the way of peace."]

But can it be said that the darkness is passed away from the souls of all?

[Would to God that my text were true in this extent also. Beloved brethren, are not many of you still in the darkness, if not of Judaism itself, yet of the Judaizing teachers, who insisted on combining some obedience of their own with the merits of Christ? Are not the beauty, and glory, and

^h 1 Pet. ii. 9.

ⁱ Acts xx. 20, 27.

excellency of our holy religion so indistinctly seen by many amongst you, that it produces scarcely any effect upon your hearts and lives? If we look at morals, are not your views of them also very imperfect? Read our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and see whether your heart go along with it in all that it inculcates respecting patience, forbearance, meekness, forgiveness? Read St. Paul's description of love in the 13th chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, and see whether that be the standard at which you aim, and by which you estimate your attainments? Have you any idea of your duty to your brethren requiring, that, if it may subserve their spiritual and eternal interests, you should lay down your life for them? I will not ask what *speculative* notions you may have of these things; for in that respect your views may be correct enough: but what is your practice? it is by *that* that your character must be tried: and, when tried by that, say whether you are not found altogether wanting. That there is great danger of self-deceit in reference to this matter, is clear from what the Apostle says in the very words following my text: "He that *saith he is in the light* and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light; and there is none occasion of stumbling in him; but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes^k." You perceive that a man may be very confident that he is in the light; and yet be so defective in respect of love, as to be in utter darkness, and going he knows not whither. I pray you, guard against so fatal a delusion as this; and never conceive yourselves to be "children of light," till your whole spirit and temper, candidly examined, attest that you are "walking as children of the light^l."]

It may be that you would wish to have two QUESTIONS solved:

With answering them, I will conclude the subject—

1. How shall I obtain the change spoken of in the text?

[Many directions I might give you; and all proper in their place: but there is one, which, if it do not supersede all others, will at least prove amply sufficient for this occasion. Our blessed Lord says, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light

^k ver. 11—13.

^l Eph. v. 8.

of life^m." Here the direction is from such authority as cannot be withstood, and at the same time so complete, that, if followed, it cannot but succeed. In truth, all other directions, in comparison of this, are like advising persons to light a taper of their own, when they might come forth at once to the noon-day sun. By the Lord Jesus Christ the whole darkness, whether from without or from within, shall be dispersed at once. The nature and perfections of God, the spirituality and extent of the law, the use of the whole of the Mosaic ritual, together with the whole work of redemption, will all be made visible as the light itself, to one who obtains just views of Christ. The whole system of morals too will be rendered clear and luminous; and all the sublime motives and encouragements to obedience be reflected with irresistible efficacy upon the soul. This then I say; Go to the Lord Jesus Christ: follow him: contemplate him; believe in him as having in himself all fulness for the supply of those who trust in him: and you shall soon "be guided into all truth," and experience in the richest abundance the glory and blessedness of his salvation.]

2. How shall I improve that change, supposing it to have been wrought within me?

[This is a question which every child of light should ask: and, as our blessed Lord answered the former, so shall the Apostle Paul answer this. Speaking to persons who were truly enlightened, he says, "Ye are all the children of the light and of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober: for they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night: but let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvationⁿ." You can easily perceive that a change of views should be followed by a corresponding change of conduct; and, consequently, that henceforth you should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them^o." The mercy vouchsafed to you, has not been given for yourselves alone, but for others also; before whom you ought to "shine as lights in a dark place^p," yea so to shine, that all who "behold your light may be constrained to glorify your Father that is in heaven."]

^m John viii. 12.

^o Eph. v. 11.

ⁿ 1 Thess. v. 5—8.

^p Phil. ii. 15, 16.

MMCCCCXXXVII.

THE DIFFERENT GROWTH AND PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S CHILDREN.

1 John ii. 12—14. *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

THE word of God is intended for every individual of mankind, that all, being acquainted with their own state, may know what God says respecting them. On this account it is the duty of ministers to mark with accuracy the discriminating features of every character, and, by “rightly dividing the word of truth,” to “give to every one his portion in due season.” St. John affords us a good example with respect to this: for, not content with “separating the precious from the vile,” he arranges the saints themselves into distinct classes, according to their several attainments, and declares to each those peculiar marks wherein they differ from each other.

There is indeed a tautology in this place, such as does not occur in any other part of the inspired volume. Whether this was intended, or whether a considerable part of the thirteenth verse was inserted by the mistake of an early transcriber, we cannot say: but the whole of that verse, except the last clause, might be omitted without any loss, because every word in it is repeated afterwards.

Our intention is simply to address the several classes of Christians here specified; first drawing their respective characters, and then setting before them their distinctive privileges and attainments.

I. We speak to “you, little children”—

[In order to come under this title, it is necessary that you should have been “begotten with the incorruptible seed, the Word of God,” and been brought into God’s family by the renewing influences of his Spirit. It is not supposed that you have grown to any stature in the family of Christ, but, on the contrary, that you have either recently “come out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel,” or, at least, made very little advance in the divine life. You are, however, born again. You have seen your guilt and helplessness; you have fled to Christ for refuge: you have sought for mercy through the blood and righteousness of your incarnate God. You have obtained a new nature: and, though you are yet weak in all your faculties and all your powers, there is no part in you that is wholly unrenewed. Your understanding, though dark, is enlightened with some rays from the Sun of Righteousness. Your affections, though far from pure, are yet, on the whole, turned to God, and heavenly things. The Divine image, though far from perfect, is, in a measure, formed upon your souls; so that it already appears whose you are, by the resemblance which you bear to your heavenly Father.

Hear then the privileges which belong to you. In the first place, we declare from God himself, that “your sins are forgiven you.” Whatever they may have been, however numerous, however heinous, (God makes no distinction, nor can we presume to make any,) they are all “blotted out of the book of God’s remembrance,” nor shall so much as one of them ever appear in judgment against you. From the first moment that you believed in Christ, and became truly regenerate, this was your happy portion: you were not to wait for it till a life of holiness should confirm your title to it: a free and full pardon was yours, the very instant you became a child of God. But remember for whose sake this pardon has been bestowed upon you. It has not been for your own sake; for you deserved nothing but wrath; yea, if God at this moment were to enter into judgment with you according to your present deserts, you must inevitably perish. God has had respect to his dear Son: and “for HIS sake” has forgiven you. The pardon you enjoy, was bought with the precious blood of Christ. It is altogether on account of what Christ has done and suffered for you, that you have found acceptance. “There is no other *name* given under heaven whereby you, or any other sinner, can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.”

Further, it is said of you, that “ye have known the Father.” Your views of the Gospel are at present very partial, and confused. You merely see that you were sinners before God: and that God, in infinite mercy, sent his only-begotten Son to die for you; and that through the death of Christ you are to

obtain mercy. Hence you are emboldened to look unto God as reconciled to you in Christ Jesus; and with a spirit of adoption to cry, Abba, Father. Thus, though you see as yet but little of the work and offices of Christ, you know the Father as a just, yet merciful, and gracious God.]

II. We would next address "you, young men"—

[As in the natural world children grow up to manhood, so in the spiritual world there is a similar progress to maturity. We might proceed to draw the necessary distinctions between your infantile and adult state: but the privileges annexed to your state in the words of our text, will serve at the same time to mark the progress which you have made in the divine life; and therefore we shall confine ourselves to them.

You then are declared to be "strong:" and in this you differ widely from your former state: for whereas you formerly were liable to be "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine," and to be overcome by every temptation, you now have obtained a stability both in knowledge and in grace. Not that you are stronger *in yourselves* than you were formerly: but you have learned how weak you are; and have been led to rely wholly on the Lord Jesus Christ; and "through him have been enabled to do" what, in your self-confident state, you were unable to perform. Hence "ye are strong; but it is in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and in the power of his might." Your conscious weakness is the means of your strength. You can say with the Apostle, "when I am weak, then am I strong."

It is characteristic of your state also, that "the word of God abideth in you." When you were children, you knew but little of the word of God; but you have studied it: you have "desired it, and delighted in it, as unadulterated milk; and by means of it have grown up" to maturity. You have found that there is no weapon so powerful as that. You have learned, not only from the Saviour's example, but from your own experience, that one single arrow taken out of that quiver is sufficient to vanquish all the hosts of hell. Hence you have been led to treasure up the promises in your memory; and to have recourse to the inspired volume for direction and support in every emergency.

Further, it is said, that "you have overcome the wicked one." In your earlier days Satan beguiled and vanquished you in ten thousand instances; but now you have attained the knowledge of his devices. He himself, if we may so speak, has at last taught you how to repel his assaults, and to resist him with success. You are become expert in the spiritual warfare. You know how to wield "the sword of the Spirit." You know when and where to expect your enemy. You know

the way in which he manages his assaults. And you have learned to combat him upon your knees. This, though a disadvantageous posture in earthly conflicts, you have found to be the best that can possibly be resorted to in the spiritual warfare. Hence you have had the comfort of seeing that wicked fiend, who assaulted you with the subtilty of a serpent, and the fury of a roaring lion, flee from your face intimidated and confounded^a."

O remember these your high privileges, and labour continually to walk worthy of them! — — —]

III. Lastly, we would speak to you also who are "fathers" in Christ—

[As age and experience elevate a man to a higher rank in the community than he possessed while in the vigour of his youth, so it is in the Church of God. Not that age, or even long continuance in the Church of Christ, can entitle a man to the appellation of "father:" for some are not born to God till they are far advanced in life; and others, through carnality or sloth, have made so little progress in religion, that they have need to be treated as babes, when, for the time that they have professed godliness, they ought to have attained the age and stature of fathers^b. Those only are deserving of this honourable name, who have maintained a long and successful conflict with the powers of darkness.

Respecting you then it is said, that "ye have known him that is from the beginning." Whom he intended to designate under this expression, the Apostle himself tells us: it is Christ, who "was in the beginning with God, and was God^c." Now the distinction between you and young men principally consists in this; that by your numerous conflicts you have been compelled to make use of Christ in all his offices, and have thereby attained a more extensive knowledge of his love and mercy, his power and grace, his truth and faithfulness. From your own experience therefore you can trust in him yourselves, and can exhort others also to trust in him with the most unlimited confidence, and to glory in him as their "all in all."

See then, fathers, that ye improve your knowledge for this end: and soon ye shall "see him as ye are seen, and know him as ye are known" — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who are included under any of the foregoing titles—

^a Jam. iv. 7.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 12.

^c Compare John i. 1. with 1 John i. 1

[Let the least and meanest in God's family rejoice in the unspeakable blessings vouchsafed unto them. But let not the most advanced imagine, that they are not yet to proceed to higher attainments. All must "war a good warfare;" all must seek to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus:" all must "be faithful unto death, if ever they would obtain a crown of life."]

2. To those who have never yet been brought into the family of God—

[Dearly beloved, the forgiveness of sins is the *exclusive* privilege of God's children. This is manifestly implied in the address to little children. O then seek to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus! Our Lord tells you repeatedly that "you **MUST** be born again:" and that, "if you be not, you never can enter into the kingdom of heaven." Pray then that you may "be born of the Spirit;" and that you may be interested in the Redeemer's death. So shall you be numbered with the children of God, and be made partakers of their inheritance for evermore.]

MMCCCCXXXVIII.

LOVE OF THE WORLD FORBIDDEN.

1 John ii.15—17. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever^a.*

WHATEVER our attainments may be in the divine life, we still need the voice of warning and exhortation, to keep us from the evils to which we

^a This text might be treated somewhat differently:—Thus,
Consider,

I. The persons addressed.

II. The exhortation given them.

III. The force of the exhortation as so addressed.

The two first heads might easily be taken from this and *the foregoing Discourse*; and the third head be treated in distinct Addresses to the three different classes. Thus,—

"*Little Children*;" Think into how many sins the world has

are exposed. As believers, we have been brought out of “a world which lieth in wickedness :” but still we are encompassed with temptations, and bear about with us a corrupt nature which is ever liable to be ensnared by them. In persons most advanced in the divine life “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh ; so that they cannot do all that they would ;” and may be easily seduced to do things, which, according to their better judgment, they would not.

The Apostle has been addressing the whole Christian Church according to their age and stature in the divine life, under the names of Little Children, Young Men, and Fathers; and now, to the one as well as to the other of these classes, he gives the injunction in our text. Let all classes therefore amongst *you* also receive the word as addressed personally to yourselves, whilst we consider,

I. The injunction here given—

There are few subjects, if any, in the whole course of our ministrations, that require a more careful and temperate discussion than that before us. The solemnity with which it is introduced, and the extraordinary emphasis with which it is impressed on our minds, evince beyond a doubt the great importance of it : whilst, as if it were of no importance whatever, or there were no danger of erring in relation to it,

enticed you ; and will you love the world now that those “sins are forgiven you ?”

“*Young Men* ;” The world is Satan’s ground : withdraw from it, and you vanquish him ; but go back to it, and he will “overcome you.”

“*Fathers*.” You who have attained such a knowledge of God, cannot but see how irreconcilable the love of the world is with the love of God. Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than are these opposing *tastes*. Compare Rom. viii. 5, 6. and Jam. iv. 4. with the text.

A more impressive subject than this would be, can scarcely be conceived ; especially if the two parts were first treated separately, as in this book, and then a third Sermon were written on them conjointly, and the *connexion between them formed the sole and entire subject of the sermon.*

every one puts the construction upon it which suits his own habits and inclinations, and takes for granted that his views of it are correct. But the truth is, that there is in this subject a need for the nicest discrimination, lest, on the one hand, we make the prohibition more strict than Jehovah himself intended it to be; or, on the other hand, give to it a latitude which is contrary to his mind, and ruinous to all who practically adopt it. A man who lives in monastic seclusion will be ready to say, that this passage forbids all intercourse with the world: whilst a person living in an unrestrained commerce with the world, will see in it nothing that condemns the most unrestrained compliance with the maxims and habits of the world, provided they be not palpably and grossly immoral. In like manner they will differ as widely respecting the *extent* of the prohibition as the *object* of it; the one supposing that every degree of inclination towards the world is forbidden; the other, thinking himself at liberty to “wallow in earthly indulgences as a sow in the mire^b.” It is obvious therefore that we should enter on this subject with extreme caution; determining with the greatest care,

1. The import of the terms—

[What are we to understand by “*the world?*” In answer to this question, I should say, it comprehends *all the things of time and sense*, as standing in opposition to the things which relate to a better world. The Apostle Paul suggests to us this very distinction, when he says that we are to “look, not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal^c.” This will appear more clear, whilst we consider what is meant by “*loving*” the world. We are *not* to understand by it *every degree of attachment* to it, but only *such a degree as is inordinate*, and *such a degree as puts its object in competition with the things which are invisible and eternal*. Amongst the things of time and sense must be reckoned a man’s intercourse with his own family. Shall we then say, that a man ought to have *no* pleasure in the society of his own wife and children? Such an absurdity carries its own refutation along with it. Hence then I take the term, not in a positive, but comparative, sense; and regard

^b 1 Pet. ii. 22.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 18.

it as importing, that we are not to give to any object of time and sense that *kind* or *measure* of affection which is due only to things of eternal moment.

The Apostle's own explanation of his meaning will throw further light on this matter. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are very generally understood as importing all those things which administer to sensual gratification; and those things which, when beheld, are apt to fascinate us with their attractions; and those things which men chiefly affect, as elevating them in the estimation of mankind; or, in other words, *pleasure*, and *riches*, and *honour*. And if to these we apply what was before specified as implied in the term "love," we shall be prepared to determine with very considerable accuracy,]

2. The extent of the prohibition—

[The word "*love*" comprehends three things; esteem, desire, and delight: and, if we apply it in this extent to the various things above-mentioned, we shall, I think, understand with clearness the Apostle's meaning in our text. Some measure of love, I again say, the things of this world are entitled to: they may be *esteemed*, as gifts from a gracious God; they may be *desired*, as means of honouring him, and benefiting our fellow-creatures; and they may be delighted in, as conducive to our comfort, when rightly improved: for "*God has given us all things richly to enjoy*^d." But,

They are not to be esteemed, as though they possessed any intrinsic good. They are all in themselves empty, vain, perishing, and utterly incapable of administering any real comfort to the soul, or even of benefiting us at all, any farther than God shall be pleased to make use of them for that end.

They are not to be desired so as in the least degree to interfere with our pursuit of higher and better things. "Our affections are to be set on things above, and not on things on the earth^e." The two cannot, and must not, be put in competition with each other. The one, how dear soever in itself, must be despised and *hated* in comparison of the other: father, mother, wife, children, yea and our own life also, must be of no account with us, if they at all stand in our way of serving and honouring our God^f. His claims are paramount to every other; and there is nothing either in heaven or on earth to be desired in comparison of him^g.

They are not to be delighted in, as things in which, to whatever extent they were multiplied, we could be satisfied with taking up our rest. Job seems to have had singularly clear

^d 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^f Luke xiv. 26.

^e Col. iii. 2.

^g Ps. lxxiii. 25.

and just views of this subject: "If," says he, "I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; *if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much*; this were an iniquity to be punished by the judge, for then I should have denied the God that is above^h." Whoever he be that, on account of his earthly comfort, says, "Soul, take thine ease," is justly branded as "a fool," and to all eternity will find occasion to bewail his folly.]

With the help of these distinctions I think we may fix, with some precision, the true import of the injunction before us, and may proceed in a satisfactory manner to consider further,

II. The reasons with which it is enforced—

In confirmation of what he says respecting the world, the Apostle declares,

1. That it is not worthy of our love—

[If we look at *its nature*, how *base* is it! "it is not of the Father, but of the world." What is there in the whole circle of the world that can boast of an heavenly origin? Nothing, not an atom of it either comes from God, or leads to God, any farther than it is sanctified unto us by the covenant of grace. It is enjoyed by heathens, as well as by Christians: and what does it do for them? Yea, what does it advance the real welfare of the great mass of the Christian world? It altogether arose out of the fall of man. In Paradise, the world was nothing; and God was all. It was not till sin had entered into the world, that the world and its lusts were put in competition with God, or that a love to present things had attained an undue ascendant over the soul. And were man still in his primeval innocence, all pleasures, riches, and honours would be of no account, any farther than God was enjoyed in them, and they were made subservient to his glory

Again; if we look at *its duration*, it is altogether *transient*: "the fashion of this world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." What has the lover of this world of all that he has ever enjoyed? and how long will the savour of his present enjoyments abide with him? How long can he secure the continuance of them? and what will remain of them the moment he has departed hence? On the other hand, if he love God, and do his will, he has a continual feast: his gratifications never cloy: his bliss will bear reflection, and be renewed by the retrospect: the consciousness that he has *a taste* for such enjoyments will itself

^h Job xxxi. 24, 25, 28.

be a source of very sublime happiness; of a happiness which he will possess under the most afflictive circumstances, and which will sooth even the pangs of death itself: and this source of enjoyment, instead of being confined to this present life, will be infinitely enlarged, and afford inexhaustible supplies of bliss to all eternity.

Say then, brethren, whether this world is worthy of a Christian's affections? I do not hesitate to say, it is not: for it affords nothing that is capable of satisfying an immortal soul; and the poor gratifications it does afford, are all perishing even whilst they are in our handsⁱ.]

2. That a love to it is absolutely incompatible with love to God—

[How solemn is the declaration, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him?" This, if delivered on *man's* authority, might be deemed uncharitable; but it is declared on the authority of God himself: and a very little reflection will convince us of the truth of it. Can any man conceive that an angel, if sent down from heaven to sojourn here for a time, would set his affections on things below? no; we are well assured, that he would have far juster views of earthly vanities, than to set his heart upon them: his taste would be too refined for such gross aliment. He would fulfil the duties that were assigned him, whatever they might be: but his heart would be with God; with God supremely, and with God alone. Thus then it should be with us: and thus it *must* be, if we be Christians indeed: for "we cannot serve God and Mammon^k:" "the very friendship of the world is enmity with God." As the will or desire to serve the king's enemies, if it were clearly proved, would constitute us traitors to our king and country, even though we had not succeeded in our efforts, so the very *will and desire* to be the friends of the world is itself sufficient to prove and "*constitute us* enemies of God^l." As the love of God grows in the soul, the love of the world abates: and, as the love of the world revives, the love of God decays: the two are as opposite to each other as light and darkness: and neither can prevail but by the expulsion of the other.

Again then I ask, is not here abundant reason for the injunction in my text? If the love of God and of the world could exist together, there were some reason for harbouring both: but as they are in direct and unalterable opposition to each other, we cannot but unite with the Apostle in this salutary admonition, "Love not the world."]

ⁱ Col. ii. 22.

^k Matt. vi. 24.

^l Jam. iv. 4. See the remarkable force of the words in the Greek.

Whilst, however, I cordially unite in this sentiment, I would *add*,

1. Be careful in passing judgment upon others—

[There is scarcely any subject on which men are so prone to exercise a censorious disposition as this. They are ready to make their own habits, or at all events their own views, a standard for others: and the more strict any persons are in relation to themselves, the more apt they are to pass an uncharitable judgment upon others. But we are not capable of judging rightly for others, unless we can put ourselves exactly into their situation. A person in lower life has little conception of what may be proper for a person of opulence and distinction. Besides, there are a thousand circumstances which may produce somewhat of a diversity of conduct in persons of equal rank and station. Persons in an inferior station are ready to think that the possession of things that are valuable or splendid, is wrong: but the text does not say, that we must not *possess* the world; for we may possess crowns and kingdoms: nor does it say that we may not *use* the world, or even *find pleasure* in it: for we may use it, and find pleasure in it too; since, as has been before observed, God has “given us all things to *enjoy*, and *richly* to enjoy.” The prohibition relates to *the heart and the affections*, which are not to be set on the world, or on any thing in it, *in comparison of God*. And who can judge *the heart*? The man who lives in a palace may have far less *love* of the world, than his censorious neighbour that is living in a cottage. Let us judge *ourselves* as severely as we please: but let us leave *our neighbour* to be judged by him who knows the heart. “To his own master he standeth or falleth:” the rule for us to walk by is plain enough: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”]

2. Be firm and determined in your own course—

[What you *are* to love, is here plainly declared: “The love of the Father” is put in opposition to the love of the world: and “the doing of God’s will,” in opposition to the seeking of any transient enjoyment. Let this then be your care, “even to *love* and *serve*, not the creature but the Creator alone^m.” Here you need fear no excess. On the contrary, as the prohibition extends to the world and to *all that is in it*, so the command of loving God extends to him, and to *all that is in him*; his whole mind, his whole will, all his perfections, all his purposes, all his dispensations. In this respect you may learn of worldly men. See how faithful they are in their adherence to the world; how active in its cause, how laborious

^m Rom. i. 25.

in its pursuits, how immersed in its enjoyments, how insatiable in their desires after its richest communications. And, if you tell them that they are seeking after a mere phantom, they account you either splenetic or mad. Be ye then firm against those who would deride your pursuit of heavenly objects; and serve *your* God, as they serve *theirs*, wholly, uninterruptedly, and in defiance of all that can be said to turn you from your ways. In a word, "Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and know, that when *they* shall reap only vanity for their recompence, *you* shall find that "your labour has not been in vain in the Lord."]

MMCCCCXXXIX.

THE TRUE GROUNDS OF A CHRISTIAN'S STABILITY.

1 John ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

THERE have been many apostasies from the Church of God, in every age. Of those who for a time were Christ's disciples, "many went back, and walked no more with him^a." Of such apostates the Apostle Paul also complained^b: and of such St. John speaks, in the words before us. There had, many years before, been teachers who "went forth from the Apostles in Judæa, subverting the souls of men by inculcating the necessity of circumcision^c:" so now, there were some who separated themselves from St. John, and the Church under his care; and, either by their false doctrines or unholy lives, brought disgrace upon the Gospel, and obliged the Apostle to guard the whole Christian Church against them. He calls them antichrists; because, in fact, whatever they might pretend, they were the greatest enemies to Christ. Not that they had ever been truly upright before God: for, if they had been really one in heart and spirit with God's Church and people, they would never have gone out from them; but God suffered them thus to depart, that the Church might no longer be injured by them, or be involved in their disgrace.

^a John vi. 66.

^b 1 Tim. v. 12, 15.

^c Acts xv. 1, 24.

But St. John had a further reason for exposing these apostates. It had been foretold by our blessed Lord, that, previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, "there should arise false Christs, and false prophets, who, if it were possible, should deceive the very elect;" and that the prevalence of those persons should be "a sign that the destruction of the Jewish Church and polity was near at hand^d." St. John refers to it in that view: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even so now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last time." Then he adds, "They went out from us; but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

To elucidate these remarkable words, I will shew,

I. Why the insincere are suffered to become apostates—

All who are insincere do not become apostates: for we are told, that the tares will grow together with the wheat, even to the harvest^e. But God is pleased to leave some of those who join his Church to apostatize from it;

1. That they may be exposed to merited disgrace—

[Those who are insincere in their profession of religion greatly dishonour God, and do incalculable injury to his Church and people. It is but just, therefore, that they should be left to expose themselves, and to "make it manifest that they never truly belonged to the Church of Christ." They were as branches of the living vine, it is true; but they were only dead branches, whose end was to be broken off, and burned^f. True, they were not distinguished from others by their brethren; who could see no further than the outward act, and were led from Christian charity to put the most favourable construction on all which they did. Not even Judas, who was a thief from the beginning, was suspected by his fellow Apostles: in fact, they all questioned their own sincerity, rather than his^g.

^d Matt. xxiv. 3—5, 24, 25.

^f John xv. 2.

^e Matt. xiii. 29, 30, 39, 40.

^g Matt. xxvi. 22.

Much less was Demas discoverable from others: indeed, so eminent was his profession, that he was twice joined with St. Luke, by the Apostle Paul, in his salutations to the Churches^h: but we can have no doubt but that the world was really uppermost in his heart during the whole time of his profession, though, perhaps, unperceived even by himself: and at last he betrayed to all his lurking preference, and “forsook the Apostle Paul, having loved this present worldⁱ.” But, as “amongst the heathen, who did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave up many to a reprobate mind^k;” so he gave up these also to the evils of their own hearts, that on them might come the shame and condemnation which they so richly merited: “They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and God gave them up to their own delusions, that they might apostatize and perish^l.”]

2. That they may be a warning to others—

[Lot’s wife is particularly presented to us in this view. She came out of Sodom with her husband; but her heart was there; and she looked back, and was made a pillar of *salt*; that is, an *everlasting* monument of God’s righteous indignation, and a warning to all future generations. Hence our Lord says, “Remember Lot’s wife^m.” In like manner, the abandonment of the Israelites in the wilderness to their own lusts, and to the punishment consequent upon them, was ordained of God to be a warning “to us, upon whom the ends of the world are come, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they didⁿ.” In truth, every instance of apostasy speaks loudly to us, “not to look back, after we have once put our hand to the plough^o;” since, if we do “turn back, it will be unto perdition^p,” and “our last end will be worse than our beginning^q.”]

But the remarkable assertion of the Apostle, relative to the stability of the upright, leads me of necessity to shew,

II. What security the upright have, that they shall never be left so to dishonour their holy profession—

It is of great importance that this subject be understood aright. The doctrine of the perseverance

^h Col. iv. 14. Philem. ver. 24.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^k Rom. i. 28. ^l John xiii. 26, 27. with 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^m Luke xvii. 32. with Gen. xix. 26.

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 6, 11. with 2 Pet. ii. 1—9.

^o Luke ix. 62.

^p Heb. x. 38, 39.

^q 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

of the saints, as it is called, is by many accounted extremely dangerous and delusive; but if it be duly explained, and *placed on its proper grounds*, it will commend itself as perfectly unexceptionable, and as indisputably true.

It is affirmed by some, that there is in true believers *an indefectible principle of grace*, which renders it impossible for them to fall—

[I confess, I think this a very erroneous view of the subject; and I think that the passages of Scripture adduced in proof of this doctrine do not warrant the conclusions drawn from them. Our Lord, we are told, asserts, that “the Holy Spirit shall be, in his people, a well of water springing up unto eternal life^r.” But this only marks *its constant tendency*, without determining its absolute and certain issue. St. Peter also says of Christians, that “they are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible:” but he tells us, in the very next words, what that seed is; it is not an inward indefectible principle of grace, but “the *word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever^s.” And this throws the true light upon another passage which is cited in confirmation of this point, even on that assertion of St. John, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God^t.” A man really born of God doth not, and will not, *commit sin*, as once he did: for the tendency and operation of divine grace will be, to keep him from it. But the absolute *indefectibility of the grace received by him* is not here asserted: nor is it asserted in our text, when it is said, that, if those apostates had been really and vitally united to the Church, “they would have remained with the Church.” *The doctrine itself is true*; but the ground, on which some endeavour to establish it, is, in my apprehension, unsound and erroneous: for I do not conceive that there is, or ever was, upon the face of the whole earth, a man who could say, “I have within me *an indefectible principle of grace*, so that I cannot fall, or cannot perish.” Even Adam in Paradise could not say that: and sure I am that St. Paul did not entertain that sentiment, when he said, “I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest that, by any means, after having preached to others, *I myself should be a cast-away*.”]

The stability, of which my text speaks, stands on other grounds: it arises from,

^r John iv. 14.

^s 1 Pet. i. 23.

^t 1 John iii. 9.

^u 1 Cor. ix. 27.

1. The immutability of God's purpose—

["God's counsel shall stand; and he will do all his pleasure^x." And this counsel he has exercised in reference to the salvation of men; some of whom he has "chosen before the foundation of the world^y," yea, and "chosen unto salvation," through faith in his dear Son^z: and "those, whom from eternity he has predestinated to the adoption of children, he calls and justifies in time, and glorifies in the eternal world^a." And, as in his nature "he changeth not^b," so, in reference to these things, "there is with him no variableness, neither shadow of turning^c:" and on this our hope, and the hope of all his people, is founded: for, seeing that, "in order to shew to us the immutability of his counsel, he has confirmed his promise with an oath, we, who have fled to Christ for refuge, have from that very circumstance the more abundant consolation^d." On this ground, all his people may be confident that "he will perfect that which concerneth them^e;" and that "He who hath begun the good work in them, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ^f." On this ground, the very least and weakest of his saints may hope that they shall "endure unto the end^g;" since they are assured that God "will never, never leave them, or forsake them^h."]

2. The sufficiency of his grace—

[Were man expected to keep himself, there is no one who must not sit down in despair. But we expect that God will exert in our behalf that very power which raised up his dear Son from the deadⁱ; and that "his strength shall be made perfect in our weakness^k." We know that "his grace is sufficient for us^l," how great or numerous soever may be the difficulties with which we have to contend. We are assured, that "none can ever pluck us out of his hands^m;" and that, as "he will not depart from us," so his fear put into our hearts will be sufficient to keep us from ever departing from himⁿ; and, consequently, we may even now exult and triumph over our enemies, almost as we shall do in heaven itself; saying, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Yea, we may be 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^o."]

^x Isai. xlvi. 10.

^a Rom. viii. 29, 30.

^d Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^g 2 Thess. iii. 3.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁿ Jer. xxxii. 40.

^y Eph. i. 4.

^b Mal. iii. 6.

^e Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^h Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^l 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^o Rom. viii. 35, 39.

^z 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^c Jam. i. 17.

^f Phil. i. 6.

ⁱ Eph. i. 19.

^m John x. 29, 30.

It may be asked, Wherein does the difference between the two views appear?

[Things often commend themselves more by an easy and familiar illustration, than by a long train of argument. We will therefore, with permission, use the simplest illustration that can well be imagined. Only let it be first remembered what it is that we are undertaking to illustrate. It is this. Man, by conversion, is brought into a state which the natural man, by his own powers, can never attain. When he is brought into that state, some think that an indefectible principle is infused into him; and that, in consequence of that abiding and indefectible principle, he is, and *must* of necessity be, preserved from falling. I admit that he *shall* be kept from falling; but I deny that it will be through the necessary influence of grace already received. I assert, on the contrary, that he is *in himself* as liable to fall as ever, and that it is from an *extrinsic source* he derives all his stability: and that, consequently, whilst he has the strongest possible hope in God, he ought to keep in abiding and undiminished exercise a holy fear: yea more, I must say, that, if once he lose that fear, and become self-confident, he is already on the very verge of destruction.

Now, then, take the illustration which is familiar to the mind even of a child. A kite soaring on high is in a situation quite foreign to its nature; as much so as the soul of man is, when raised above this lower world to high and heavenly pursuits. A person at a distance sees not how it is kept in its exalted station: he sees not the wind that blows it, nor the hand that holds it, nor the string by whose instrumentality it is held. But all of these powers are necessary to its preservation in that preternatural state. If the wind were to sink, it would fall: if the hand should cease to hold it, or the string should break, it would fall. *It has nothing whatever in itself to uphold itself*: it has the same tendency to gravitate to the earth as ever it had; and, if left for a moment to itself, it would fall. Thus it is with the soul of every true believer. It has been raised, by the Spirit of God, to a new, a preternatural, a heavenly state; and in that state it is upheld by an invisible and Almighty hand, through the medium of faith. *And upheld it shall be; but not by any power inherent in itself.* If left for a moment, it would fall as much as ever. Its whole strength is in God alone; and its whole security is in the *unchangeableness of his nature*, and in the *efficacy of his grace*. In a word, "it is kept *by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation*."

P 1 Pet. i. 5. Peter and Judas fell equally. But they were not equally recovered. And why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ had

There is, indeed, one particular, in which the illustration fails; namely, that the kite is upheld without any concurrence of its own; whereas the soul, notwithstanding its entire dependence on God, does yet, in fact, "work out its own salvation." I grant this: I grant, that what God effects for the soul, he effects through the instrumentality of its own volition and action. But it must be remembered, that "it is He, and He alone, who works in the soul either to will or to do^q;" and, consequently, that the work is as much *his*, as if the believer himself were purely passive: only, indeed, inasmuch as the believer's concurrence is necessary, he has the greater cause to implore of God that aid, "without which he can do nothing^r."

If it be said, that here is a distinction without a difference; and that, since the certainty of the saint's salvation is admitted, it signifies not what the means are by which he is saved; I reply, that, on the supposition of the grace which has been once received being absolutely indefectible, a man will feel no occasion for *fear*: but, if he depend solely and entirely on God, he must exercise *fear as well as faith*. In the one case, *confidence alone* is encouraged; but, in the other, *humility*: in the one case, *faith alone* is called for; in the other, *it must be blended and tempered with holy fear*. And this very distinction is marked by the Apostle Paul; "Thou standest by faith: be not high-minded, but fear^s."]

Let me, then, in CONCLUSION say, Behold,

1. What need we have to cry mightily to God for grace—

[Perish we must, if God uphold us not. And it is in the continued exercise of prayer alone that we can hope for those supplies of his grace which are necessary for us — — — "Pray, then, without ceasing^t;" and beg of him to "hold up your goings in his paths, that your footsteps slip not^u" — — —]

2. What need we have to guard against the means and occasions of sin—

[We are in the midst of a defiling and ensnaring world; and have need of continual care and watchfulness, to "keep our garments clean^x." If we become careless, Satan will not fail to take advantage of us, and to draw us into sin^y. David and Peter shew us very abundantly how frail we are, and how prone to fall, if once we enter into temptation. Hence we are

prayed for Peter, that *his faith (the connecting medium between him and his God) might not fail.*

^q Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^r John xv. 5.

^s Rom. xi. 20.

^t 1 Thess. v. 17.

^u Ps. xvii. 5.

^x Rev. xvi. 15.

^y Luke xxii. 31.

told to “come out from the ungodly world, and not to touch the unclean thing,” if we would have the presence and the blessing of our God^z. Our eyes, our ears, “our hearts, we must keep with all diligence^a;” for it is by resisting Satan that we must overcome him^b: and then only, when we, on our part, contend manfully with him, are we authorized to hope that “God will bruise him under our feet^c.”]

^z 2 Cor. vi. 17.

^a Job xxxi. 1. Prov. iv. 23.

^b Jam. iv. 7.

^c Eph. vi. 11, 13. Rom. xvi. 20.

MMCCCCXL.

THE UNCTION OF THE HOLY ONE.

1 John ii. 20. *Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

IT is a melancholy fact, that, in every age of the Church, persons have arisen from the bosom of the Church herself, not only to “speak perverse things, and draw away disciples after them^a,” but even to introduce “damnable heresies, and to deny the Lord that bought them^b.” Such antichrists had been foretold by our Lord himself; and, even in the apostolic age they existed in great numbers^c. These persons, for a length of time, could not be distinguished from the truly pious: for though the more eminent Christians, who had “the gift of discerning spirits,” might see something materially wrong in the spirit and temper of their minds, yet, inasmuch as their defects were not generally visible, nor of so determined a character as to call for public censure, they were suffered to grow up as tares among the wheat, till, by their own wilful apostasy, they manifested their character before all. From their contagion, however, the truly upright were preserved. And that which was made instrumental to their preservation was, “an unction from the Holy One,” whereby they were enabled to “discern all things,” and consequently, by “proving all things, to hold fast that which was good.”

^a Acts xx. 30.

^b 2 Pet. ii. 1.

^c ver. 18.

From hence we see,

I. The distinguishing privilege of true Christians—

They “have an unction from the Holy One”—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is undoubtedly that “Holy One” from whom the unction proceeds. By this name he is frequently designated, both in the Old Testament^d and the New^e: and, in order to the execution of his mediatorial office, he himself was “anointed with the Holy Ghost^f,” and fitted for the discharge of all that he had undertaken^g. It was foretold that he should be so anointed^h; and the prediction was visibly fulfilled at the time of his public consecration to his high officeⁱ. Of this Spirit he received “without measure^k:” and the holy oil, poured out upon his sacred head, “descends to the skirts of his garments^l.” But at his ascension to heaven this divine unction was committed to him in a more particular manner, in order that he might pour it out upon his people, who were to be anointed to some of the same offices which he himself sustained. This was foretold by David: and the accomplishment of it is declared by the Apostle Paul: but there is a difference between the passage as uttered by the prophet, and as cited by the Apostle; a difference worthy of particular observation. David says, “Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast *received* gifts for men^m:” but St. Paul, in quoting it, says, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and *gave* gifts unto menⁿ.” The truth is, that Jesus *received* this gift, *on purpose that he might give it*: and he does give it, according to the promise which he made to his people^o, and according to the promise which the Father himself made to them in Abraham two thousand years before^p.]

This is their distinctive privilege—

[“Sensual or natural men have not the Spirit:” and it is in consequence of their not having it, that “they separate themselves,” precisely as those did who are spoken of in the text^q. But every true believer has this divine unction abiding in him^r: and it is from the very circumstance of his having received this unction, that the believer is emboldened to claim, as it were, a relation to his God^s. Without this, he would not be able to perform any part of his duty aright: he could

^d Ps. xvi. 10. Dan. ix. 24. ^e Acts iii. 14. Rev. iii. 7.

^f Acts x. 38. ^g Isai. lxi. 1. with Luke iv. 18.

^h Isai. xi. 1—3. ⁱ Matt. iii. 16, 17. ^k John iii. 34.

^l Ps. cxxxiii. 2. ^m Ps. lxxviii. 18. ⁿ Eph. iv. 8.

^o John xvi. 7. ^p Gal. iii. 13, 14. ^q Jude, ver. 19.

^r John xiv. 16, 17. ^s 1 John iii. 24. and iv. 13.

not “walk” acceptably to God, but by the Spirit^t: he could “not even pray as he ought^u :” he could “not so much as call the Lord Jesus Christ his Lord, but by the Holy Ghost^x.” To this divine unction he is indebted for the very existence of life in his soul : and the man who has it not, is even dead before God^y. And hence he may affirm, without the remotest danger of mistake, that, “if any man be led by the Spirit of God, he is a Son of God^z ;” and, on the contrary, that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his^a.”]

To estimate aright this high privilege, we must further consider,

II. The benefit they derive from it—

When it is said, that “they know all things,” we must of course not so interpret the words as to include the knowledge of arts and sciences, or even a *scientific* knowledge of religion itself. The Apostle means only, that by this divine unction the Christian attains an acquaintance with all things that are necessary,

1. For his preservation from error—

[Human wisdom is not sufficient for this : and the more it is relied upon, the more likely it will be to deceive and ruin us. To be “wise in our own conceit,” and to “lean to our own understanding,” are marks of extreme weakness and folly ; and those who habitually indulge these evils, are sure, at last, to fall : for God, who has promised to guide and instruct the humble^b, has declared, that “he will take the wise in their own craftiness^c.” That we may see what a preservative this divine unction is, let us bear in mind, that he who has it, “has in himself the witness” of all the most important truths of Christianity^d ; so that, when a deceiver endeavours to subvert his faith, he has in his own bosom a conviction which nothing can shake. He may not be able to answer the arguments that are brought against him, any more than he could maintain a disputation with one who should assert, as some have done, that there is no heat in fire : but he can no more be turned from his persuasion, than he could be made to believe that there is no sun in the firmament, or that he could subsist without food. An adversary might dilate upon the dignity of human nature till his voice failed him : but he could never persuade a Christian that the heart is any other than what God has declared it

^t Gal. v. 16.

^y Eph. ii. 1.

^b Ps. xxv. 9.

^u Rom. viii. 26.

^z Rom. viii. 14.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 9.

^x 1 Cor. xii. 3.

^a Rom. viii. 9.

^d 1 John v. 10.

to be—"deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked^e." He might expatiate upon the sufficiency of man's righteousness to justify him before God: but he could never induce a true penitent to rely on any thing but the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the righteousness which is of God by faith^f." He might assert, as confidently as he would, the ability of man to fulfil the will of God: but the man that has this divine unction knows "that without Christ he can do nothing^g." Thus he has, if I may so speak, a compass whereby to steer even in the dark, and can traverse the seas in safety; whilst those who have only the dictates of human wisdom for their guide, are left to run on rocks and shoals, to their eternal ruin^h.]

2. For his final salvation—

[This divine unction, duly improved, shall be sufficient for every thing to which the Christian is called. By it, he shall mortify the whole body of sinⁱ. By it, he shall be able to sustain every affliction that can come upon him^k. By it, he shall be changed into the perfect image of his God^l.

We must not, however, misunderstand the Apostle, as though this unction of the Holy One superseded an attention to the word of God, or the necessity of continual diligence on our part. The word of God is, after all, our only directory: and to imagine, as some do, that the *light within* renders the written word unnecessary, is a very dangerous error. The light within is necessary, just as the light of the sun is for the discovery of time upon the dial: but as the dial is of no use without the sun, so neither will the sun suffice without the dial. And, whatever office the Holy Spirit executes, he executes it by and through the written word. Nor let it be supposed that we can acquire divine knowledge without much studious application to the word of God: for Solomon tells us, that it is not by either prayer or study, *separately*, that we can attain knowledge: it must be by both combined: "If we cry after knowledge, and search for it as for hid treasures, then shall we understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God^m."

It is proper I should yet further guard against an idea, that this divine unction supersedes the necessity of diffidence on our part: for though it is true, that, on the great leading and fundamental doctrines of the fall, and of the recovery by Jesus Christ, the inward witness of these truths may suffice to preserve us, there are ten thousand errors, into which we may

^e Jer. xvii. 9.

^f Phil. iii. 9.

^g John xv. 5.

^h Prov. xxviii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 13.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^m Prov. ii. 3—5.

fall, even whilst we *think* that we are taught by the Holy Ghost. From damning error and apostasy he will keep his people; but not from *all* error: for then there would be no room left for diversity of opinion in the Church of God. But we shall never “see eye to eye” in this life. There will still be room left for difference of sentiment, in matters of minor importance: and mutual forbearance in relation to them will be necessary, even to the end. In things essential, there should be unity; in things non-essential, liberty; and in every thing there should be charity.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who doubt the doctrine of our text—

[To speak of a divine unction, as given to us to secure us from error, and to bring us to salvation, appears, to many, to be a wild and enthusiastic conceit. They believe that the Holy Ghost was given formerly to the Church for the working of miracles; but they will not believe that he is continued to the Church, for the purpose of guiding, and comforting, and sanctifying the soul. But to any one who doubts his need of the Holy Spirit, I would say, What did our blessed Lord mean, when, in counselling the Laodicean Church, he said, “Anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest seeⁿ?” I do not conceive it possible to explain away that passage; or for any one, who believes the Scripture, to doubt but that there is an unction of the Holy One, which we all need, in order to the attainment of a spiritual discernment. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to “glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are Christ’s, and shewing them unto us^o.” Let not prejudice, then, keep any from seeking this inestimable benefit; but let all entreat of God to send down upon them “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ^p,” and so to “guide them into all truth^q,” that they may “be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”]

2. To those who profess to be living in the experience of it—

[Have any of you been thus anointed, and thus preserved? Then give God the glory of it; and say with the Apostle, “He who hath established us in Christ, and hath anointed us, (you observe the union of the two, as in the text,) is God^r.” But remember, that the world can only judge of your professions by your practice. You profess, that “by the unction of the Holy One you *know* all things:” let it be seen, then, that by the unction of the Holy One you

ⁿ Rev. iii. 18.

^o John xvi. 14.

^p Eph. i. 17, 18.

^q John xiv. 26. and xvi. 13. ^r 2 Cor. i. 21. with 1 John ii. 27.

do all things. It is by your fruits that you must be judged, both by God and man. See to it, then, that you guard against that conceit which so prevails in heretics and apostates. To your latest hour you must retain a childlike spirit, and particularly in the simplicity and docility of your minds. You must guard, too, against every corrupt bias. "If your eye be single, your whole body will be full of light: but if your eye be evil, your whole body will be full of darkness." In particular, be careful not to make the truths of God an occasion of needless contention. For the fundamentals of religion you must indeed contend, and *that* earnestly, if need be; but even in reference to them, it would be better to recommend to your adversaries, and to cultivate for yourselves, the study of the Holy Scriptures with prayer. In this way, you will "grow both in knowledge and in grace;" and "your light will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

MMCCCCXLI.

BELIEVERS ARE SONS OF GOD.

1 John iii. 1. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*

RELIGION is altogether a mystery: every part of it is deeply mysterious. The restoration of a fallen soul to God! The means of effecting that restoration—the death of God's only dear Son, as a sacrifice for sin; and the operation of his Spirit in the sinner's heart! The effect produced—the translation of a soul from the family of Satan to the family of Almighty God! This is the point which the Apostle is contemplating in my text: and it fills him, as we might well expect, with the profoundest wonder and admiration: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

That we may enter into the Apostle's views, and attain somewhat of his spirit, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What is comprehended in the relation of sons—

No one need to be informed on this subject, as far as it relates to men. But in the relation as borne to

God, there is much which needs to be elucidated. In it are comprehended,

1. An adoption into his family—

[By nature, we belong to a far different family: for “we are of our father the devil:” and, being “children of disobedience,” we are also “children of wrath.” But God takes to himself a people out of that wretched mass, and adopts them as his own; giving to them *the name* of sons, *the privileges* of sons, *the endearments* of sons, and acting towards them in all respects as a loving Father — — — It is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ that he effects this. In “sending his Son to redeem them that were under the law,” he did it, “*that we might receive the adoption of sons^a.*”]

2. A participation of his nature—

[When man adopts any person, he may *deal with the adopted person as his son*; but he can *never really make him a son*. But when God sets apart any for this high relation, he creates them anew, and makes them entirely “new creatures.” He imparts to them his Holy Spirit, and makes them “partakers of the divine nature^b,” so that they become, in reality, his sons; being “begotten of him,” and “born unto him^c.” Hence, with the new relation, there spring up in their souls new views, new dispositions, new desires, new habits altogether^d: and in God also there arises, not a mere arbitrary good-will, but a paternal interest, a special regard, such as exists in every part of the creation between the parent and the progeny. All this, then, is comprehended, (this change of nature on their part, and this peculiar regard on his,) when we speak of any as made “sons of God.”]

3. A title to his inheritance—

[This does not necessarily exist among men; but with God it does. Every one that is born of him, is begotten to an inheritance, even an inheritance that “fadeth not away^e.” “If we are sons, we are also heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^f.” There is this peculiarity also attaching to the children of God: they are all his “first-born^g.” They are the brethren of Christ; and partakers with him in all that he himself inherits—his throne, his kingdom, his glory^h.]

And now let us contemplate—

II. The wonderful love of God, in bringing us into that relation to himself—

^a Gal. iv. 4, 5.

^b 2 Pet. i. 4.

^c 1 John v. 1, 18.

^d Gal. iv. 6. and Rom. viii. 15, 16.

^e 1 Pet. i. 1, 3, 4.

^f Rom. viii. 17.

^g Exod. iv. 22. Heb. xii. 23.

^h Rev. ii. 21. John xvii. 22.

When it is said, “*We are called* the sons of God,” it means that we are really *made* so. And this change is altogether the effect of God’s unbounded love. Behold, then, what manner of love this is :

1. How sovereign !

[It is wholly unmerited on our part. There never was, there never could be, any thing in us to attract the Divine regards, since “every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts was only evil continually.” In the selection of his objects, God was as free as in the choice of Abraham from amidst an idolatrous world, or of Isaac and Jacob in preference to their elder brethren. In conferring this high honour, God has respect only to his own will, and to the glory of his own name. This is marked with peculiar strength and force by the Apostle Paul, when, *speaking on this very subject*, he says, “God has predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the belovedⁱ.” In truth, “He loved us because he would love us^k :” and because “he loved us with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn us^l.”]

2. How beyond all human expectation !

[If man adopt any one, it is because, having no progeny of his own, he feels a want of some one to succeed to his estates : and in conferring this favour, he has respect to some qualities in the person selected by him. But God has no need of us. We can never add either to his happiness or glory. Or, if he needed any creatures to be objects of his favour, he could create any number, either of angels or men, as it should please him, and make them the happy objects of his choice. But it is not thus that he has acted. He has chosen from amongst men, corrupt and sinful men, multitudes, who shall *in time*, be born to him, and *in eternity* enjoy him. Nor is it of *the best* of men that he has made his selection, but often of the vilest. Even a murderous Manasseh has been made a vessel of honour, and a monument of grace ; whilst millions of persons, less guilty, have been passed by. If we ask the reason of this, our Lord assigns the only reason that can be given : “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” The potter has power over the clay, to do with it as seemeth him good : and “shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus^m ?” True it is, that, in reference to this matter, we must say, as David did in

ⁱ Eph. i. 5, 6.

^l Jer. xxxi. 3.

^k Deut. vii. 7, 8.

^m Rom. ix. 20, 21.

reference to the favours conferred on him, "Is this the manner of men, O Lord Godⁿ?" No; it is not the manner of men; nor ought it to be: because man has *a claim* on his fellow-man; but we have no claim whatever on God. He might have left *us* to perish, precisely as he did the fallen angels, and never have saved so much as one: and, if he have saved one, that person has reason to exclaim with wonder, 'Why have I been taken, whilst so many others have been left?' God, in all this matter, does as it pleaseth him; and "he giveth not account to us of any of his matters:" "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts^o."]]

3. How utterly incomprehensible!

[So the Apostle declares the love of Christ to be: it has "a breadth, and length, and depth, and height, that passeth knowledge^p," and defies the search of the brightest intelligence of heaven. To all eternity will the wonders of this grace be unfolding; and to all eternity will it remain as far from being fully comprehended, as it was at the very first moment it was revealed. Indeed, we must comprehend the infinite distance between the glorious Creator and his rebellious creatures; and then go on yet further, to comprehend all the wonders of redemption, before we can comprehend the smallest portion of this mystery. We must close our meditations, after all, with that with which we have commenced them: "What manner of love is this which the Father hath bestowed upon us!"]]

"BEHOLD" then, brethren, "behold" it: "Behold" it, I say,

1. With due solicitude to ascertain the fact—

[God has bestowed this favour upon millions: but hath he bestowed it upon *us*? In this inquiry we are deeply interested: nor should any one of us leave it as a matter of doubt for one single hour. But you will ask, 'Can this point be ascertained?' By the world around us, I readily acknowledge, it cannot be ascertained: and, if we profess to have been brought into this relation to God, we must not wonder that the world ascribe our pretensions to the workings of pride and presumption. For they know nothing of God, or of his operations upon the souls of men: how, therefore, should they be able to judge of our claims in this matter? The Apostle, in the words following my text, justly adds, "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." But we may ascertain the point ourselves; for we have a standard by which to try

ⁿ 2 Sam. vii. 19.

^o Isai. lv. 8, 9.

^p Eph. iii. 18, 19.

ourselves; and we may examine ourselves by it without any difficulty. St. John elsewhere says, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God^a." Here are the very relations of which we are speaking, and the means by which we are brought into it, and the test whereby we are to try ourselves. Inquire, then, whether you have ever "received the Lord Jesus Christ" into your hearts by faith, and whether you are "living altogether by faith on him?"— — — If you have never come to Christ as lost sinners, and cast yourselves wholly upon him, you know infallibly that you are *not* yet brought into this relation of "sons of God." But if Christ be "all your salvation and all your desire," then you possess this high privilege; for "we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus^r:" and, if you look up to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit, he will shine upon his own work, and "give you his Spirit, to witness with your spirits, that you are indeed the children of God^s." Again then I say, Leave not this matter in suspense; but "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, and try your own selves: and never rest, till you can adopt the words of our text with a special reference to your own souls.]

2. With a becoming zeal to walk worthy of this high calling—

[Certainly, this relation brings with it corresponding duties. If you are made sons of God, it is that you may serve and honour him as dear children. How this is to be done, St. Paul informs us: "Be blameless, and harmless, *as sons of God*, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, amongst whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life^t." Well, indeed, may the world cry out against your vain conceit, if you are not walking worthy of your high calling. God has called you, that you should be holy: and "if you have in you the hope of which we have been speaking, then will you purify yourselves, even as Christ is pure^u." Look to it, then, that you walk as becometh saints, in all holiness and righteousness before God and man. By this test will you be tried at the last day; and all your professions of faith in Christ will be found a delusion, if you shew not your faith by your works. But, if God have, indeed, bestowed this honour upon you, then will his love have a constraining influence upon your souls; and you will strive to be "holy, as he is holy," and "perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

^a John i. 12, 13.

^r Gal. iii. 26.

^s Rom. viii. 16.

^t Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^u ver. 3.

MMCCCCXLII.

THE INESTIMABLE PRIVILEGES OF BELIEVERS.

1 John iii. 2. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

OUR Lord was hated, reviled, and persecuted unto death: but we see how glorious was his person, and how exalted his character. In the same manner his followers are treated with contempt: but God declares their state to be the most honourable upon earth. To this effect St. John represents them as slighted by man and honoured by God.

I. The present state of believers—

The Scripture speaks of believers in the most exalted terms. They are not merely servants, but “sons of God^a.”

This they are by *adoption*—

[Every believer was once a child of wrath^b. But God takes whom he will into his own family^c: he adopts them as his sons, and makes them heirs of his glory^d.]

They are brought into this relation also by *regeneration*—

[Once they had only a carnal mind that was enmity against God^e; but they have been born again of the Holy Spirit^f; they are renewed after the image of their heavenly Father^g.]

They enjoy this state “*now*”—

[Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, partake alike of this honour; nor does God withhold it from any on account of their remaining infirmities; even now, while the world despises them, does God own his relation to them.]

What an unspeakably blessed state is this!

[How different is it from the state they were once in! How great the privileges which they enjoy by means of this relation! How sweet the sense of this relation often is to

^a 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^b Eph. ii. 3.

^c Eph. ii. 19.

^d Rom. viii. 15, 17.

^e Rom. viii. 7.

^f John i. 13.

^g Col. iii. 10.

their souls! To what a glorious state does it lead them in a better world! Well might the Apostle break forth in wonder and admiration ^h—.]

Yet, blessed as it is, it falls infinitely short of what it will be in,

II. Their future state—

Very little is known respecting this—

[We can form no idea of spiritual and glorified bodies. We cannot imagine how extensive will be the capacities of the soul. We have very faint conceptions of perfect holiness and perfect happiness. Even one who had seen Christ transfigured, says, “It doth not appear,” &c.]

Yet there are some things revealed to us—

[We shall see Christ, not merely by faith, but with our bodily eyesⁱ; not veiled as formerly, but in all his glory. We shall resemble him too in all his imitable perfections. This resemblance will result from our sight of him. Even “our bodies shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” This shall be fully accomplished at the great day of his appearing.]

These things we may be said to “know”—

[We have already experienced the earnest of them in our hearts. When we believe in him, we have views of him which we had not before; these transform the soul into his image^k. Our Lord has given us the fullest assurance of these things^l. St. Paul also leaves us no room to doubt^m.]

INFER—

1. How wonderfully different the lot of believers and unbelievers!

[Believers are the children of God. Unbelievers are the children of the wicked oneⁿ. Believers can form no adequate conception of the happiness that awaits them. Unbelievers have no idea of the misery to which they are hastening. How different will be the appearance of each in that day! How different their feelings on seeing Christ upon his judgment-seat! For what different ends will their capacities of soul and body be enlarged! What a different state will they experience to all eternity! Let none defer calling upon God for mercy. Let all seek his regenerating grace, and an admission into his family. If we will believe in Christ these blessings shall be ours^o.]

^h 1 John iii. 1.

ⁱ Job xix. 25—27.

^k 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^l John xvii. 24.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 49. Col. iii. 4.

ⁿ John viii. 38, 44.

^o John i. 12.

2. How bright the prospects of the true Christian!

[The Christian's warfare will soon be over: then will come a blessedness which he cannot now conceive; another day may bring him to the full possession of it. Let these prospects animate every pious soul. Let none suffer their minds to be drawn away by the things of time. Let every one stand ready to take his flight^p. Let the beloved Apostle be our example^q.]

^p 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^q Rev. xxii. 20.

MMCCCCXLIII.

THE FRUITS AND EFFECTS OF HOPE.

1 John iii. 3. *Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

THE people of God are but little known to an ungodly world: instead of being considered according to their true character, they are regarded as hypocrites, enthusiasts, and disturbers of their brethren's peace. But this is easily accounted for: the world know not God; and therefore it is no wonder that they know not his people. But the saints themselves have a very inadequate conception of the honour that is put on them, or of the glory that is reserved for them. They know indeed that they are sons of God; but they have very little idea of what is comprehended in that relation: and as to their eternal state, they can form no precise judgment respecting it; they only know, in the general, that they shall be like God, and be with him for ever. Yet though so little known to the world, and to themselves, they have marks whereby they may be clearly distinguished; they may be known by their uniform endeavours after holiness. To this effect the Apostle speaks in the words before us; from which we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The Christian's hope—

Christ is the fountain and foundation of a sinner's hope: without Christ, all must have perished: nor has the most eminent saint any more hope than a fallen angel, except as he is interested in the merits of

Christ. But through *him*^a the believer has a glorious hope;

1. That he is a child of God—

[Christ, having purchased us with his own blood, has reconciled us to God, and made us his children. He teaches his followers to consider themselves as standing in this relation to God, not merely like the angels who are his sons by creation, but in a more exalted manner by regeneration and adoption: and he teaches them to expect from him throughout their whole lives the blessing suited to that high dignity^b — — —

Now the true Christian hopes that he is brought into this happy state, and that he shall receive from God all those endearing tokens of affection which the relation of sonship emboldens him to expect. This hope of his is founded partly on the merits of his Saviour, and partly on the internal evidence which he has, that he is interested in the Saviour. The mere circumstance of Christ having laid down his life for him, would not be a sufficient ground for him to number himself among the family of God: but when he has the testimony of his own conscience that he has sought acceptance with God through the death of Christ, then he is enabled to indulge a hope that the privileges annexed to such a state belong to him.]

2. That he shall be with God, and like him, for ever—

[The blessings which the saints enjoy are not confined to this life: “Being sons of God, they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^c.” “Though they know not yet what they shall be, they know that, when they shall see him, they shall be like him; for they shall see him as he is^d.” The time is coming, when they shall all be introduced into his immediate presence, and be with him and like him for ever. This also is an object of the Christian’s hope — — — He believes that this is the heritage of the saints; and that “what God hath promised, he is able, and willing, to fulfil.”]

That this is no barren hope, will appear from,

II. The effect it produces in him—

Every Christian will endeavour to purify himself to the uttermost—

[The Christian cannot wilfully live in any known sin: he will search out his corruptions, in order to subdue them; and

^a The text does not say, *ἐν ἑαυτῷ*, in *himself*, but *ἐπ’ αὐτῷ*, in *him*, that is, in Christ.

^b ver. 1. John i. 12, 13. Matt. vi. 6, 8, 9, 31—33.

^c Rom. viii. 15—17.

^d ver. 2.

his duties, in order to fulfil them — — — He will propose to himself the Lord Jesus Christ as his pattern: and though he can never hope to attain absolute perfection in this life, he will not rest satisfied with any thing short of that. He would gladly be “holy as God is holy, and perfect, even as his Father in heaven is perfect.” He considers how the Lord Jesus acted in reference to God: how in reference to man; and what tempers he manifested in the whole of his deportment; — — — then he labours to follow *his* example, and to “walk in all things as he walked.”]

To these endeavours he will be stimulated by his hope in Christ:

[He cannot endure to think himself a child of God, and yet act like a child of the devil: he cannot please himself with a prospect of enjoying and resembling God in a future life, without seeking communion with him and a resemblance to him in the present world. He will feel himself impelled to holiness by *a sense of duty*^e; by *a sense of gratitude*^f; yea, moreover, by *a love of holiness itself*^g — — —

We must not however imagine that it is by any power of his own that he thus “purifies himself;” the duty and the exertion are his^h: but the power, both to will and to do, proceeds from God aloneⁱ.]

We shall improve this subject,

1. For conviction—

[All profess to have a hope in Christ: but before we conclude that to be well-founded, we must examine what fruits it produces: Are we seeking after universal holiness? Are we contented with no measure of holiness short of perfection itself? Are we setting the Lord Jesus before us, and taking him for our pattern in all our tempers, and in our conduct towards God and man? This is the criterion by which St. John himself teaches us to judge of our hope^k: and St. James confirms it—by declaring, that, if in any one point (the not bridling of our tongue, for instance) we allowedly deviate from this path, “our religion is vain^l.” O consider this, lest your hope be only as the spider’s web, that will be swept away with the besom of destruction !]

2. For encouragement—

^e He knows he cannot be saved in any other way. Ps. xxiv. 3, 4. Matt. v. 8. Heb. xii. 14. Rev. xxi. 27.

^f 1 Thess. ii. 12. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^g Ps. cxix. 128.

^h Jam. iv. 8.

ⁱ Phil. ii. 13.

^k ver. 6—10.

^l Jam. i. 26.

[Though we must not think our hope well founded, unless it produce in us the fruits of righteousness, yet we must not imagine that our righteousness is to be *the ground* of our hope, or even *our warrant* to hope in Christ. The only ground of our hope must be found in Christ, and in the promises which God has made to those who believe in him. We must go to Christ *as sinners*; and then he will enable us to live *as saints*. This distinction is clearly marked in the text: our hope in Christ is to precede, not to follow, the purification of our hearts: and our holiness is to be the fruit, not the root, of our hope. The same distinction is made by St. Paul also, who, having spoken of our sonship with God, says, "Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God^m." We must not wait till we are cleansed, and then embrace the promises: but first embrace the promises; and then make use of them for the cleansing of our souls.

What encouragement does this afford to those who feel the corruption of their hearts, and who, if their own purity were to be *the foundation* of their hope, would be in utter despair! Go then, how polluted soever ye are, and seek pardon and sanctification at the hands of Jesus; and you shall find him "faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousnessⁿ."]]

^m 2 Cor. vii. 1. See the same also by St. Peter, 2 Pet. i. 4.

ⁿ 1 John i. 9.

MMCCCCXLIV.

CHRIST MANIFESTED TO TAKE AWAY SIN.

1 John iii. 5. *Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*

AMONGST the numberless advantages which the light of revelation has conferred upon us, one of particular importance is, the strength of the motives which it suggests to us for the mortification of sin. A heathen could devise no argument beyond what related to our own welfare, and that of society at large. But Christianity discovers to us wonders, of which unassisted reason could form no conception: it declares to us, that Almighty God himself assumed our nature for the express purpose of counteracting the effects of sin, and of destroying its power. To

those therefore who have embraced Christianity, here is an argument that is wholly irresistible, if once it be admitted into the mind, and suffered to have its due operation upon the soul. St. John avails himself of it in the passage before us. He is shewing to the Christian world that they must aspire after universal holiness, and purify themselves “even as their incarnate God was pure:” and the more effectually to enforce his exhortations, he makes this unanswerable appeal to all of them without exception: “Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin.”

The destruction of sin being the great scope and end of our ministry also, we will,

I. Open to you his appeal—

The great end of our Saviour’s incarnation was to take away sin—

[Sin has separated man from God, and God from man^a: nor was it possible that they should be re-united in mutual love and amity, unless this evil were removed. But removed it could not be, either as to its guilt or power, by any efforts of man: nor could all the angels in heaven render to him any effectual aid. God therefore of his own love and mercy “laid help for us upon one that was mighty^b,” even upon his co-equal, co-eternal Son, whom he sent into the world on this benevolent errand, to “put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself^c,” and to “subdue our iniquities” by the efficacy of his grace^d.

For this the Lord Jesus Christ was well fitted, by reason of his own spotless character. This I conceive to be particularly intimated in our text. The connexion between the two clauses of the text does not at first sight appear; but we apprehend, that the mention of the spotless character of Jesus is intended to convey this idea, namely, that, being himself without sin, he was fitted for the work assigned him; and could present to God such an offering as our necessities required. Under the law it was especially appointed, that the sacrifices should be without spot or blemish. The Paschal lamb was set apart four days before it was offered, on purpose that it might be scrutinized to the uttermost, and thus be proved fit for its destined use^e. The Lord Jesus too went up to Jerusalem four

^a Isai. lix. 2.

^b Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^c Heb. ix. 26.

^d Mic. vii. 19.

^e Exod. xii. 3, 6.

days before his crucifixion, and underwent the strictest examination at different tribunals, and was declared innocent, by Pilate his judge, by his fellow-sufferer on the cross, by the Centurion who presided at his execution: all his enemies thus unwittingly attesting, that he was indeed “a Lamb without blemish and without spot^f,” and that, being “just himself,” he was every way fit to “suffer in the place of us the unjust^g.”

In another view too his spotless character subserves this great end of his mission: for, “being without guile himself, he has set us a perfect example:” and the best possible way of avoiding sin is, to imitate his example, and to “tread in his steps^h.”]

This was known and acknowledged through the whole Christian world—

[No one who believed in Christ was ignorant of the end for which he had come into the world. Hence the Apostle could appeal to all without exception, and could say, “*Ye know* that he was manifested to take away our sins.” The whole Scriptures bore testimony to this. All the types of the Mosaic law shadowed it forth. All the prophecies from the beginning of the world attested it. It was in this way that “the Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent’s head.” “To finish transgression, to make an end of sin,” and to establish universal righteousness, *this* was to be the work which should distinguish his reign: “A sceptre of righteousness was to be the sceptre of his kingdom.” The very name that was given to him imported this: “he was called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins.”]

This truth being acknowledged by all at this time, no less than in the apostolic age, we shall make the same APPEAL to you; and,

II. Found upon it a particular address—

As Christians you all “*know*” that Christ came to deliver you from sin: but do you all *consider* it, as you ought?

1. Ye who live in wilful and habitual sin—

[Do you consider what has been done to rescue you from your bondage? Do you consider that the Son of the living God, “Jehovah’s fellow,” the Creator of the universe, has come down from heaven, and assumed your nature, and died upon the cross for your redemption? Ask yourselves then, whether he would have done this, if sin had been so small an

^f 1 Pet. i. 19.

^g 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^h 1 Pet. ii. 21, 22.

evil as you judge it to be? Can you conceive that such means would have been used for your recovery, if the state into which sin had brought you was not beyond measure terrible? Had no misery awaited you, or a misery only that was light and transient, do you suppose that God would have had recourse to such a method of delivering you from it; or that, after he has used *such* means to *take away* your sin, you incur no danger by *holding it fast*? You may “make a mock of sin,” if you please; but you will not think so lightly of it when you come to stand in the presence of your Judge. When the Lord Jesus Christ shall remind you of what he endured to deliver you from it, what will ye say to him? Will ye then make the foolish excuses that ye now do? No, verily: your mouths will then be shut: you will be amazed and confounded at your present folly and impiety: and it will be no consolation to you then that there are so many in the same condemnation with yourself. The antediluvian scoffers, when warned of the approaching deluge, thought it impossible that such a judgment should ever be inflicted; or consoled themselves, perhaps, that they should be in no worse plight than others. But when the deluge actually came, did they find their own terrors less appalling, or their sufferings less acute, because they were endured by others also? Nor will ye in that day find the wrath of God a whit more tolerable because of the multitudes that shall bear it with you. Had the Saviour never come, you would have had to endure the wrath of *God*; but since he has come, and been despised and rejected by you, you shall have to bear “the wrath of *the Lamb*,” even of that Lamb whom you “crucified afresh^k” and hell itself will be sevenfold more terrible, in consequence of the means which have been used to deliver you from it. Yes, the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrha will be light in comparison of yours^l. O that you were wise, and would consider this, ere it be too late!]

2. Ye who found your hopes of mercy on your own self-righteous endeavours—

[What can ye think of yourselves, when ye recollect the principles which you yourselves acknowledge? You know that Christ was manifested to take away your sins: how then do you presume to imagine, that you can remove them by any efforts of your own? Is there any such virtue in your own tears or almsdeeds, that you will rely on them, rather than on the atoning blood of Christ? Or is there any such strength in your own resolutions, that you will trust to them for the subduing of sin, rather than to the grace of our Lord Jesus

^l Rev. vi. 16.

^k Heb. vi. 6.

^l Matt. x. 15.

Christ? Does it never strike you, that whilst you are entertaining such proud thoughts as these, you are thrusting the Lord Jesus Christ from his office, and virtually declaring, that, whatever he may be to others, he shall be no Saviour to you? Why will ye thus presume to set aside the very ends for which He came into the world? Why, when he has actually girded himself with the towel, and presented himself before you, will you say with Peter, "Thou shalt never wash *my* feet!" Know you not, that "unless he wash you, you have no part with him^m!" Be assured, he never came to make you your own saviours, but to offer you a free and full salvation. And if you will conceit yourselves to be "rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, when you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," nothing remains for you but to reap the bitter fruits of your pride and follyⁿ — — —]

3. Ye who, whilst ye profess to believe in Christ, are walking unworthy of your holy profession—

[I call on you also to consider this subject. You profess that the Lord Jesus Christ has borne your sins, and that you therefore expect that no condemnation shall come upon you. But do you think that he will be satisfied with performing half his office? Do you suppose that he will take away your sins as far as relates to their guilt, and leave them unmortified as it respects their power? This he never will do: and he declares to you that he never will. Only hear how strongly St. John speaks on this subject in the words following my text: "Whosoever abideth in Christ, (as you profess to do,) sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness, (as you profess to do,) is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil^o." What now will ye say, who are still under the dominion of pride, envy, malice, wrath, and whose conduct in your families, instead of exhibiting the image of the Lord Jesus, and constraining all to admire the excellence of vital godliness, causes religion to stink in their nostrils? What will ye say who have lewd hearts and licentious tongues? or ye who are covetous and worldly-minded, and who are in such bad repute for truth and honesty, that men would rather deal with a worldly character than with you? Ye may boast as ye will about the freeness and fulness of the Gospel salvation; but ye shall never taste of it, unless ye "put off the old man with his

^m John xiii. 4, 8.

ⁿ Rev. iii. 16, 17. See also Rom. ix. 31, 32. and x. 3.

^o ver. 6—8.

deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness^p.”]

4. Ye who are bowed down with desponding fears—

[I must not overlook you; for the text speaks powerfully to you also. In the habit of your minds you are saying, “My sins are too great to be forgiven; or, my lusts are too strong to be subdued.” But is Christ unable to effect the work he has undertaken? Was he manifested to take away your sins, and has he proved incompetent to the task? Are we not told that “the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin?” And that “his grace is sufficient” for all who trust in him? What then is there in your case that renders you an exception? Oh, do not so dishonour your adorable Saviour, as to doubt his sufficiency for the work that has been assigned him. Know that his blood is a sufficient “propitiation, not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world;” and the weakest creature in the universe is authorized to say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” Put away then your unbelieving fears; and look to him to “accomplish in you all the good pleasure of his goodness.” So shall you find that “he is able to save you to the uttermost;” and soon you shall join in that blessed song, “To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^q.”]

^p Eph. iv. 22—24.

^q Rev. i. 5, 6.

MMCCCCXLV.

THE END OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

1 John iii. 8. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

THE author of this epistle survived all the other Apostles; so that, long before his death, the professed followers of Christ had had ample opportunity of shewing what the effects of religious principle would be, after that the impulse of novelty should have ceased: in some the sacred fire would burn with undiminished ardour; but in others it would languish so as to leave room to doubt whether it were not altogether extinguished. Hence, in this General Epistle, St. John lays down a variety of

marks, whereby men might judge of their state before God. In the chapter before us he shews the indispensable necessity of holiness, and the extreme danger of imagining ourselves in a state of acceptance with God, whilst destitute of his image on our souls: he shews this, as from other topics^a, so especially from this, that the indulgence of any sin counteracts the very end for which Christ came into the world; since “he was manifested on purpose to destroy the works of the devil.”

Let us inquire,

I. What are those works which Christ came to destroy—

Satan, envious of the happiness of man in Paradise, endeavoured to bring him to the same state of guilt and misery to which he himself was reduced. How successful he was, it is needless now to mention: we all without exception experience in ourselves the sad effects of Adam's fall. Two things in particular that wicked fiend has introduced:

1. Sin—

[This was unknown to man, till Satan invaded the peaceful regions of Paradise, and prevailed on Eve to eat of the forbidden tree. He questioned the prohibition itself, or at least the equity of it; and then, denying that any evil consequences would ensue, he urged the vast advantages that would be derived from transgressing the Divine injunction; and thus “beguiled Eve by his subtilty.” From that time he has practised upon others in a similar way, “blinding their eyes^b,” and putting all manner of wickedness into their hearts^c. It is at his instigation that all the children of disobedience execute their wicked purposes^d: he, as their father, teaches them, and constrains them, as it were, to fulfil his will.

Even the godly he tempts, and labours to deceive by innumerable “wiles,” and most subtle “devices^e,” and, “if it were possible, he would deceive the very elect.”]

2. Death—

[This also he introduced; for by sin came death, as its proper “wages,” and its necessary consequence. Satan had

^a ver. 3—10.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^c Luke xxii. 3. Acts v. 3.

^d Eph. ii. 2. and vi. 11, 12.

^e 1 Thess. iii. 5. 2 Cor. xi. 3.

assured our first parents that "they should not die:" but in this he shewed himself "the father of lies:" and by it he became "a murderer from the beginning^f." The very instant they obeyed his voice, they died: temporal, spiritual, eternal death became their portion, and the portion of the whole human race^g: nor would any child of man have ever seen the face of God in peace, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to "destroy this work of the devil." As to the great mass of mankind, they are experiencing all the bitter effects of that first transgression: inheriting a corrupt nature, they follow the bent of their own inclinations, and rush on blindfold to everlasting perdition^h. "The devil has taken them in his snare, and leads them captive at his willⁱ." Hence he is called Apollyon, and Abaddon^k, as being the great and universal *destroyer*.

Nor does he relinquish his endeavours to destroy even the best of men: "he goes about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour:" there are not any so holy, but he shoots his "fiery darts" at them, and torments them with cruel buffetings^l, and "desires to have them that he may sift them as wheat:" and, were he permitted, he would soon reduce even the soundest of men to chaff.]

Let us next inquire,

II. How he destroys them—

He came into the world, and "was manifested" in human flesh on purpose to destroy them: and he effects their destruction,

1. By the virtue of his sacrifice—

[The death of Christ was a true and proper atonement for sin; it was "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world:" and by it "he finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness^m." Nor has he merely cancelled our debt, or removed our obligation to punishment, but has "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." "On the cross he triumphed over all the principalities and powers of hellⁿ;" and, "by death, overcame him that had the power of death, and delivered them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage^o." Yes, when our final victory over sin and death shall be celebrated in heaven, to *this* shall we ascribe it altogether; "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood^p."]

^f John viii. 41, 44. ^g Rom. v. 12, 15—19. ^h Eccl. ix. 3.

ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 26. ^k Rev. ix. 11.

^l Eph. vi. 16. 2 Cor. xii. 7. ^m Dan. ix. 24. with ver. 5.

ⁿ Col. ii. 15. ^o Heb. ii. 14. ^p Rev. v. 9.

2. By the operation of his grace—

[“ Dead as we are in trespasses and sins, we are quickened by Christ^a ;” and immediately begin in his strength to conflict with sin and Satan. The warfare we maintain is attended with many difficulties ; so that we are sometimes ready to cry out, “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death ? ” but in our lowest state it is our privilege to add, “ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord^r .” “ In him we are strong ;” and through his gracious communications “ we can do all things : ” “ none can be effectually against us, whilst he is for us. ” Having infused into our souls a principle of life, “ he dwells in us, ” and “ is himself our life^s , ” and carries us forward “ from conquering to conquer, ” till sin and “ Satan are bruised under our feet, ” and “ death itself is swallowed up in everlasting victory. ”]

OBSERVATIONS—

1. How infatuated are they who live in wilful sin !

[Do they consider whom they serve, and against whom they fight ? Do they consider that they are doing those very works which proceed from and characterize the devil, and which Christ was manifested to destroy ? Reflect on your conduct, brethren, in this view, and then judge, whether ye do well to continue in it — — —]

2. What reason for humility have even the best of men !

[There is no man who has not daily occasion to lament his short-comings and defects. We are not any of us so watchful, but Satan finds some opportunities to deceive us ; nor so expert in our warfare, but he wounds us occasionally by “ his fiery darts. ” And when that wicked fiend has “ got an advantage over us, ” with what exultation is he filled, even though he knows that he can never ultimately prevail against our blessed Lord ! Be watchful, brethren, that ye do not so gratify your malignant adversary, or so grieve the Spirit of your adorable Saviour. Put yourselves more habitually under the protection and guidance of your Divine Master ; and “ through him you shall be more than conquerors. ”]

3. How unbounded are the obligations we owe to Christ !

[Who but he could have ever redeemed us from sin and death ? Who but he could have ever destroyed for us those works of the devil ? Think what would have been the state of the world, if he had never become incarnate ; what slaves we

^a Eph. ii. 1.

^r Rom vii. 24, 25.

^s Col. iii. 4.

must have been if he had not liberated us; and what a death we must have undergone, if he had not died in our stead! Verily, if we felt our obligations as we ought, we should scarcely pass a moment without adverting to them, and magnifying him with songs of praise and thanksgiving. Let us dwell on the delightful thought, which, wherever it is entertained, creates a heaven upon earth: and in a little time our deliverance shall be complete; and we shall unite with all the hosts of heaven "in singing Hallelujah to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."}]

MMCCCCXLVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DELIVERANCE FROM SIN.

1 John iii. 9. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*

MANY mistakes in religion arise from not considering sufficiently the style and manner in which the inspired writers are wont to express themselves. They speak strongly on all subjects; and never contemplate, for a moment, the niceties of criticism; or dream of their words being weighed in a balance, so as that there shall be the minutest possible precision in their weight and import. They are content with speaking in popular language, and with conveying their sentiments in terms which every candid mind shall fully apprehend. St. Paul, speaking of the danger of persons who are once enlightened, falling away from the truth which they have received, says, "It is impossible to renew them again to repentance^a." We are not to suppose, from this, that the restoration of such an apostate is a work which God is not able to effect; but only, that it is a work which we cannot reasonably hope to see effected by him. The same kind of interpretation must be given to the words which we have just read: we are not to suppose that a regenerate person is brought into such a state, that there is an absolute and physical impossibility for him to commit any the minutest sin: such an

^a Heb. vi. 4—6.

impossibility as that did not exist even in Paradise, when man was absolutely perfect; no, nor does it exist in heaven itself; since millions of once holy angels actually did fall, and were cast out of heaven for their transgression. Not intending his words to be strained to such an extent as that, the Apostle declares,

I. The state of the regenerate man—

To consider the Apostle as saying only that a regenerate man *ought not* to commit sin, would be to make him speak what is altogether foreign to the context; the whole of which evidently shews his meaning to be, that the regenerate man *does not* commit sin.

But, in what sense are we to understand this assertion?

[If taken in its utmost latitude, this assertion would contradict the whole Scriptures. “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not^b.” “In many things we all offend^c.” St. John himself declares, that “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us^d :” and then, intimating that the scope of his observations was to deter men from sin, he adds, “But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, who is also the propitiation for our sins^e.”

It is evident, therefore, that we cannot so construe his words, as to infer from them that a regenerate man has attained a state of sinless perfection. Nor, in reality, do his words properly admit of that sense: for the word which we translate “commit sin” must, of necessity, imply a *continued* act. In ver. 7, he says, “Let no man deceive you. He that *doeth* righteousness^f (it is the same word as is used in our text) is righteous, even as Christ is righteous.” This can never mean, that the person who performs *one* righteous act must necessarily “walk in all things as Christ walked:” it must import *a habit*, and *not a mere insulated act*: and *that* is its proper meaning in the text; ‘Whosoever is born of God, does not *wilfully and habitually* commit sin.’ The whole scope of the context, from the third verse, sanctions, and indeed requires, this interpretation. It is said, in ver. 3, that the person who has a

^b Eccles. vii. 20. and 1 Kings viii. 46.

^c Jam. iii. 2.

^d 1 John i. 8—10.

^e 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^f ὁ ποιῶν. See the same word used by St. John in his Gospel John viii. 34.

scriptural hope of his adoption into God's family, will "purify himself, even as Christ is pure:" and the person who does not labour to attain this purity, is declared, in ver. 8, to belong to a very different family, even that of Satan: "He that committeth sin, is of the devil." And in the verse after the text, this contrast is brought to a point: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not (*ὁ μὴ ποιῶν*) righteousness, is not of God."]

The assertion, thus explained, is verified in every regenerate man—

[A man "born of God" does not commit sin in the way that he was wont to do in his unregenerate state. Previous to his conversion, sin was the element in which he lived. He might, in respect to an external conformity to the law, be blameless, even as the Apostle Paul was, before his heart was changed: but he never truly gave himself up to God, or took his perfect law as the rule of his conduct: he never lived for God, or made it the one object of his life to glorify God: *self* was the *source* and *end* of all his actions. But from the instant of his conversion, his one inquiry is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do^g?" Not that he then becomes *perfect*: for to his latest hour he will find, as the Apostle did, that "there is a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and occasionally bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members:" yes, to his latest hour, there are things done by him which he would not, and things left undone by him, which he would gladly do: so that he is often constrained to cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me^h?" But though, through the influence of his indwelling corruption, he may have occasion to mourn over many deviations from the perfect path of duty, he never does, nor ever will, return to the love and practice of sin: if he offend in any thing, he will lament it, and implore forgiveness for it, and labour with renewed diligence and circumspection to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

If such be the state of the regenerate man, it will be profitable to inquire into,

II. The means by which he has attained to it—

"He that is born of God doth not commit sin; for *his seed remaineth in him.*"

Let us distinctly mark,

1. What seed this is—

^g Acts ix. 6.

^h Rom. vii. 15, 19, 23, 24.

[Many imagine that the "seed" here spoken of, is an imperishable spark of grace, which not all the floods of persecution or corruption can ever quenchⁱ. But it is not of *grace* that the Apostle speaks, but of *the word of God*. The word is that "seed" of which we are born: and *that* is incorruptible, as St. Peter has said: "We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, of the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever^k."]]

2. How it operates to its destined end—

[This seed "*abides*" in those who are born of God. Its operation, in the first instance, was to humble, quicken, and sanctify the soul. Being once implanted in the soul, it grows there, and continues to produce the very same fruits which it put forth in the first instance. Did it come with power to convince of sin? it enlightens the mind progressively, and gives juster views to the conscience, and augmented sensibility to the soul. Did it lead to the Saviour, and inspire with a desire to serve and glorify him? it continues to give brighter discoveries of his love, and to impress the soul with a more fixed determination to live to his glory: and in this way it keeps the believer from ever returning to his former paths.

That this is the true import of the words, is manifest from what is spoken by St. John in the preceding chapter: "I have written unto you, young men; because ye are strong, and *the word of God abideth in you*, and ye have overcome the wicked one^l." Here the same "seed" of which they were born, namely, *the word of God, abideth in them*; and, in consequence of that, their victories over sin and Satan are carried forward with increasing energy and effect. Such, at least, were David's views of this matter; and therefore to all young men he gave this direction: "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? even by taking heed thereto, according to thy word^m." And what he recommended to them, he practised also himself; as he himself immediately declares: "Thy word have I hid within my heart, that I might not sin against theeⁿ."

Thus then it is that the regenerate person is kept from committing sin, as he was wont to do in his unregenerate state: "The word of truth abideth in him," both as an authoritative director, and an unerring rule; and "by it he is made free^o," and "sanctified^p."]]

ⁱ In this sense many understand John iv. 14; as though the water given by our Lord must necessarily issue in everlasting life. But our Lord speaks, not of *its issue*, but *its tendency*.

^k 1 Pet. i. 23.

^l 1 John ii. 14.

^m Ps. cxix. 9.

ⁿ Ps. cxix. 11.

^o John viii. 32.

^p John xvii. 17.

The blessedness of the believer's state will yet further appear, whilst we consider,

III. His security for the continuance of it—

“He cannot sin, because he is born of God.” Now it is well known, that many identify the new birth with baptism, at least so far as to maintain, that if they be not actually the same thing, they are always simultaneous and inseparable. But let this sentiment be brought to the test: let it be seen, whether it can be said of every one that is *baptized*, that he *does not* commit sin, yea, and that he *cannot* commit sin, *because he is baptized*. I would ask, Is there a man in the universe that dares to make such an assertion as this? or, if there were, would not the experience of the whole world flatly contradict him? I will not say that God *may not* convert a person at the time of his baptism, as well as at any other time. God may make use of any rite, or any ordinance, or any occurrence whatever, to effect his own purposes: but to say that he always creates a man anew, in the way, and to the extent, that my text speaks of, under the ordinance of baptism, is as contrary to truth as any assertion that ever proceeded from the lips of man. And as long as these words remain in the Bible, that a man “*cannot sin, because he is born of God,*” so long it must be obvious to every dispassionate mind that there is a new birth perfectly distinct from baptism, and totally independent of it.

As for the idea, that sin, when committed by a regenerate person, is not sin, it is too wild, and too impious, to deserve a thought.

But it is a great and glorious truth, that a person truly born of God cannot sin, as he did before he experienced that change. If it be asked, *Why* he cannot sin? I answer,

1. Because God has engaged he shall not—

[God has said, that “sin shall not have dominion over his people, because they are not under the law, but under grace^a.” And his faithfulness is pledged to “cleanse them from all

^a Rom. vi. 14.

unrighteousness^r." It is a part of his covenant; every iota of which he will assuredly fulfil. This, however, is not to be so understood, as if God would never permit his people to err in any respect: for the very best of men have erred, and grievously too, under the influence of strong temptation, and of the remaining corruptions of their own hearts. But God, under such circumstances, will chastise them, till they shall return to him with deep humiliation and contrition, and till they renew their application to the blood of that great Sacrifice which taketh away the sins of the world. "It is not his will that one of his little ones should perish;" "nor will he suffer any one to pluck them out of his hands."]

2. Because he will supply him with grace, that he may not—

[This, also, is a part of God's covenant which he has made with us in the Son of his love. If this covenant were kept out of view, there are two things which we might justly apprehend: the one is, that God would depart from us; the other is, that we should depart from him. But on both parts God has undertaken for his people. He says, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me^s." It was not by a mere act of his power that he converted them at first: he enlightened their understanding, and renewed their heart, and "made them willing in the day of his power." So will he even to the end deal with them as rational beings, and "draw them with the cords of a man." "He will keep them, indeed, by his own power^t:" but it shall be through the instrumentality of their own exertions. *He will keep them; but they shall also "keep themselves; so that the wicked one shall not touch them^u."* Thus secured by God's engagement for them, on the one hand, and by the mighty working of his power in them, on the other hand, it may truly be said of them, "They cannot sin, because they are born of God."]

Yet let me IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a word of caution to the secure—

[The doctrine of Final Perseverance, if unscripturally maintained, will be productive of the most fatal consequences to the soul. Shall any man say, 'I am born of God: and therefore can never perish, though I live in sin?' Let him rather say, 'The sins which I commit, prove to demonstration, that I am not born of God. I may have been partially affected with

^r 1 John ii. 9.

^s Jer. xxxii. 40.

^t 1 Pet. i. 5.

^u 1 John ii. 14. before cited.

the word, as the stony-ground hearers; and have produced some kind of fruit, like the thorny ground: but, inasmuch as I "bring forth no fruit to perfection," I am at this very moment a child of Satan, and an heir of perdition.' Would you have an evidence that you are born of God? Inquire whether you are delivered from the love and power of sin, and following after universal holiness. These are the marks whereby alone you can form any sound judgment: and if you will judge of yourselves by this test, you will remove from the doctrine of Final Perseverance the chief objection that is urged against it; and will render it a blessing, instead of a curse, to your own souls.]

2. In a word of encouragement to those who are writing bitter things against themselves—

[Some, because they feel in themselves remaining infirmities, will conclude that they cannot possibly have been born of God. But we must not so interpret the text, as to imagine that God's people must be absolutely perfect. Were none but the perfect born of God, where should we find a child of God on earth? It is the wilful and deliberate habit of sinning, and not a mere infirmity, that is declared to be incompatible with a state of grace: and therefore let not a sense of weakness and infirmity cause any one to despond. Yet, on the other hand, it will be well to entertain a holy jealousy over ourselves; and to avoid too great a laxity in our interpretation of this passage, as well as too great strictness: for if there be in us, what is found in too many professors of religion, an habitual predominance of evil tempers or dispositions of any kind, we are certainly not born of God, but are children of the devil. At the same time, let it be remembered, that the word of inspiration is that great instrument whereby God effects his purposes on the souls of men. By that he begins, and carries on, and perfects, his work within us. Let that, therefore, be precious to us, yea, "more precious than thousands of gold and silver;" and "let it dwell richly in us, in all wisdom:" so shall we experience it to be "the rod of God's strength," and "have every thought of our hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

MMCCCCXLVII.

LOVE OF THE BRETHREN.

1 John iii. 14. *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*

LOVE is said to be “the fulfilling of the law:” and it certainly is also the great end of the Gospel. But love is of different kinds: there is a love of benevolence, a love of beneficence, and a love of complacency. The two former are due to all mankind: the latter is due to the saints alone; because they alone possess that character in which God delights, or in which it becomes us to feel delight. It is of this last kind of love that the Apostle speaks in my text, a “love of the brethren:” and of it he speaks in the highest terms imaginable. To illustrate his views of it, I will shew,

I. What is that change which every true Christian has experienced—

It is not a change of *opinions* merely, or a transition from one Church to another; but a change,

1. In his state before God—

[The unregenerate man is “dead in trespasses and sins.” Even “by nature he is a child of wrath^a,” and, by practice, he has involved himself in the deepest guilt and condemnation — — — But in conversion, a marvellous transition takes place: “he passes from death unto life.” By believing in Christ, he obtains a remission of all his sins; they are blotted out of the book of God’s remembrance; and there “no longer remains any condemnation to him on account of them^b.” From being a child of Satan, and an heir of wrath, he is made a child of God, and an heir of glory — — —]

2. In the entire habit of his soul—

[During his unconverted state, he lived to *self* alone: he had no thought or desires beyond this present world: he was altogether “alienated from the life of God,” “an atheist in the world^c.” As the body, when separated from the soul, is dead, and performs not any one function of the animal life; so his soul, being separated from God, is dead, and never once

^a Eph. ii. 3.

^b Rom. viii. 1.

^c Eph. ii. 12. the Greek.

performs any spiritual act whatever. But in his conversion, a similar change is wrought. His powers are quickened: his understanding, his will, his affections, are all called forth into act and exercise on spiritual subjects: so that "old things pass away, and all things become new." This change is not unlike that of a river which, by an invisible agency, is turned so as to flow in a direction opposite to its natural course, even upward, towards its source and head. Being thus "renewed in the spirit of his mind," "he lives no longer to himself, but unto Him who died for him, and rose again" — — —]

It will now be proper to inquire,

II. How far the test, here proposed for the ascertaining of this change, may be depended on—

Beyond a doubt, this change may be ascertained to the satisfaction both of ourselves and others—

[It is not to be supposed that so great a change should be effected both in the state and habits of a man, and he himself be unconscious of it. It is a matter of the deepest interest with him; and he will never be satisfied, till he "knows" that he has attained this great object of his desires. There are many marks by which it may be discovered, even as a tree by its fruits. The test here proposed is amply sufficient for this end. The only danger is, of mistaking the test itself, and putting something else in the place of it.]

"The love of the brethren," duly understood, will serve as an unerring test—

[Two things must be borne in mind, as distinguishing the true test from all its counterfeits. The "love of the brethren" is a love to them *purely for Christ's sake*, and a love *displaying itself towards them in all its proper offices*. It is not a love to them on account of their having embraced our sentiments, or their belonging to our party; nor will it shew itself merely in speaking well of them, and in espousing their cause: it is called forth by the single circumstance of their being the friends and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ: and it will shew itself in such a deportment towards them, as we would maintain towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, if he were circumstanced as they are. The description given of love in the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, is precisely that which the Christian will realize in his conduct towards Christians of every denomination: and *then only is it a proper test of our conversion to God, when it so operates*. But, supposing it to be of this kind, then may we "*know*" from it, without a shadow of doubt, that "we have passed from death unto life:" for such love can proceed from God alone: it springs from no root whatever but faith in Christ: and,

consequently, its existence and operation in the soul proves us to be true believers, children of God, and heirs of glory.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are strangers to this peculiar regard—

[If the existence of it in the soul prove that we *have* passed from death unto life, the non-existence of it may well lead you to fear that this change has never been wrought in you. Examine yourselves, therefore, and try your own selves. In truth, this test is of peculiar importance to *you*: for, if you will look within, you will find that, by nature, you are rather alienated from persons on account of their relation to Christ, than drawn to them: the want of congeniality of taste and sentiment sets you at a distance from them; and a consciousness of this may well lead you to conclude that you are yet dead before God. The Apostle tells us this, in the very words following my text; “He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death.” O consider this, ere it be too late: and seek that change, without which you must for ever perish!]

2. Those who think themselves under its influence—

[It must be confessed that persons are very prone to deceive themselves on this point; and to imagine that they love the brethren, when their regard is merely partial towards their own party, and when it is associated with many dispositions contrary to love. Remember then, I pray you, that your love, in order to be genuine, must be *heavenly in its origin, holy in its exercise, and uniform in its operations* — — — See, I pray you, whether your love be of this kind, before you venture to build upon it such a confident persuasion as that mentioned in my text — — —]

3. Those who are truly alive to God—

[Shew, in your whole spirit and temper, what the effect of the Gospel is. It was said of the primitive Church, Behold how these Christians love one another! Let the same mark be visible in you, and the same confession be extorted from all your adversaries: bear in mind all the offices of love, that it “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” You must not expect your brethren to be perfect: for you yourselves are not perfect: and therefore the allowances which you need from others, you must make for them: and you must take care, in thought, word, and deed, that nothing be done by you contrary to love. Be sure, therefore, that “your love be without dissimulation;” and that it shew itself “not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”]

MMCCCXLVIII.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST A PATTERN FOR US, TO EACH OTHER.

1 John iii. 16. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

IN contemplating Christianity as a system, we scarcely know whether to admire more, the depth of its mysteries, or the height of its requirements. Of all mysteries, that specified in our text, the death of our incarnate God for the sins of men, is beyond all comparison the greatest: and, of all requirements, there is not one so arduous as that, which also is here inculcated, of laying down our lives for the brethren. The two taken together present Christianity in a most endearing view; and exhibit it as alike conducive to the perfection of our nature and the completion of our bliss. Let us notice,

I. The extent in which God has manifested his love to us—

If we survey the works of *creation*, we shall see love inscribed upon them all. There was not one which the Creator himself did not pronounce to be “very good:” and, if there be any thing within the whole compass of it that is noxious to man, it was not so according to its original constitution, but has been rendered so by sin. If we mark also the dispensations of *providence*, we shall find in all of them too the same blessed character of love: for the very anger of God, is only an exercise of paternal love; and his judgments, an effort to bring his offending creatures into a state of reconciliation and acceptance with him. But it is in *redemption* that his love is chiefly displayed: for, in order to effect it, Jesus Christ assumed our nature, and actually “laid down his life for us.”

In order that we may behold somewhat of the love displayed in this stupendous act, let us consider,

1. What our situation was that rendered such an effort necessary—

[We were fallen, after the example of “the angels that kept not their first estate;” and with them we must have taken our portion to all eternity. To deliver ourselves was absolutely impossible: nor could the whole creation afford us any effectual aid. The judgments denounced against sin must be executed, either on the sinner himself, or on one capable of standing in his place, and of satisfying all the demands of law and justice. But where could such an one be found? The first archangel was unequal to the task. None but God himself could interpose with effect, even that God, whose law we had violated, and whose majesty we had offended. Such was our helpless and hopeless state, when Almighty God determined to rescue us from our misery, by sending his only dear Son into the world to offer up himself a sacrifice for sin, and, by dying in our stead, to redeem us from all the penal consequences of our transgression.]

2. What by that effort is accomplished for us—

[Our guilt is expiated — — — And God is reconciled unto his offending creatures — — — We may now go to him in the name of his dear Son. We may plead the merit of his obedience unto death. The vilest sinner in the universe has no occasion to despair. All that is necessary for his acceptance with God has been done; and he needs only to “lay hold on the hope set before him,” and to embrace the salvation that is freely offered him. If only we believe in Jesus, justice itself is become our friend and our advocate: because its utmost demands having been satisfied in Christ’s obedience unto death, it claims, on behalf of all who believe in Jesus, the transfer of those rights to which, through the intervention of our Surety, we are entitled — — —]

3. What wonders of love are contained in it—

[To what, but love, can we trace this merciful interposition of the Deity in our behalf? was there any thing in us to *merit* it at God’s hands? We, alas! were in the very state of the fallen angels, “ungodly,” “sinners,” “enemies,” filled with all evil, and destitute even of a good desire. But, if God could find no inducement from any thing that was in us to exercise this mercy towards us, was there none to be found within his own bosom? No, not any. He would have been equally happy and equally glorious, if neither men nor angels had ever existed: and, if neither his happiness nor his glory have been at all affected by the ruin of the one, neither would it have been by the ruin of the other, if we, like them, had been left to perish to all eternity. To his sovereign love and grace

alone can we trace this stupendous act of mercy: and to that it is uniformly traced in the Holy Scriptures: "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son^a:" "Herein is *love*; not that we loved God; but that *he loved us*, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins^b:" "God *commendeth his love* towards us, in that, when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^c." To all eternity will this be the one subject of wonder, and adoration, and thanksgiving to all the hosts of the redeemed; "To Him that *loved us*, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever^d."]

Our meditations on this subject will be the best preparation for considering,

II. The extent in which we should exercise love to our brethren—

To imitate our blessed Lord and Saviour, as far as possible, is our bounden duty: and especially are we commanded to do so in the exercise of *love*. Again and again does he require us to "love each other *as he loved us*^e:" and the duty is enforced from the very same consideration as is proposed to us in the text^f.

Consider then our duty,

1. Towards "our brethren" of mankind at large—

[There is not a human being towards whom we do not owe a debt of love: and were it in our power, there is not a pain which we should not alleviate, nor a want which we should not supply. This is particularly noticed in the words following our text: "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

But if this be our duty towards them in reference to their *temporal* wants, how much more is it in reference to *the concerns of their souls*! How should we weep over the unhappy state of the heathen world, immersed as they are in darkness, and subjected to the entire dominion of the god of this world! What efforts should we not make for the enlightening of their minds, and for the discovering to them that love, that stupendous love, wherewith our God has loved both us and them! Say, brethren, do ye not blush when you look back upon your conduct in this respect, and see what contracted views you

^a John i. 16.

^b 1 John iv. 9, 10.

^c Rom. v. 8.

^d Rev. i. 5, 6.

^e John xiii. 34. and xv. 12.

^f 1 John iv. 11.

have had of your duty towards them, and how little you have endeavoured to discharge your duty, even as far as it has been seen and acknowledged by you? Consider more especially your duty towards your Jewish brethren, from whom you have received all the light which you yourselves enjoy: should it be no grief to you to see that highly-favoured people so blinded by prejudice, that, with the Scriptures in their hands, they contemn, and even execrate, that very Saviour who has shewn such love to them? Why do we not feel for them? why do we not exert ourselves in their behalf? why do we not endeavour to repay to them the debt of love which we have received from their forefathers? The Apostles, and multitudes of their descendants in the ministry, laid down their lives for us, accounting themselves richly recompensed if they might but lead us to the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. O that there were in us a corresponding sense of our duty, and that we could, with one heart and one mind, rise to the performance of it!]

2. Towards our brethren of the Church in particular—

[There is an especial duty towards those who are united to the Church of Christ: “We are to do good unto all men, but especially unto them that are of the household of faith.” We owe to them a pre-eminent degree of love, *because they are so near to us, and because they are so dear to God, and more especially because there is such an identity of interest between Christ and them.* They are our brethren in a higher sense than others, being children of the same heavenly Father, and heirs of the same glorious inheritance. From all eternity have they been objects of God’s electing love; and now, the monuments of his grace, the very temples in which he deigns to dwell. Every one of them is a member of Christ’s mystical body, yea, “one spirit with him:” so that whatever we do for them, we do for Christ himself, as much as if he were personally present with us, and the visible object of our attentions. What love then do we not owe to *these*? I hesitate not to say, that our very life should be of small estimation with us in comparison of their welfare; and that martyrdom itself, if endured for the benefit of their souls, ought not to be an object of dread, so much as of desire and joyful self-congratulation. We see this love in Aquila and Priscilla^g, and in Epaphroditus also^h; but more especially in the Apostle Paul, who was contented to be “in deaths oft” for the benefit of the Church, and who, in the near expectation of martyrdom,

^g Rom. xvi. 4.

^h Phil. ii. 30.

could say, "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you allⁱ."]]

For the further IMPROVEMENT of the subject,

1. Let us contemplate our obligations—

[The love of God, which ought to be ever uppermost in our minds, alas! how light an impression does it make upon us! Even the mystery of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, and of "his laying down his life for us," is heard without any emotion, and regarded with little more concern, than if it were only "a cunningly-devised fable." What shall I say then, brethren? Must there not be something essentially wrong, where such insensibility exists? are we not ashamed? are we not confounded, when we consider the state of our souls in this respect? Let us rise to a sense of our duty. Let us view our obligations to Almighty God: let us dwell upon them night and day: and let us never rest till our whole souls go forth in love to him, who has loved us, and given himself for us.]

2. Let us address ourselves to our duties—

[Methinks, the duty of love should be no burthen to us: it is in itself most delightful; and brings always its own reward along with it. Let us then exercise it in all its branches. Let every disposition contrary to love be mortified and subdued: all envy, hatred, malice, wrath, uncharitableness, let it all be banished from our hearts; and let the love which hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things, be the one reigning principle in our souls.

Let this principle too be brought into activity for the benefit of all mankind. Our time, our talents, our property, our very life, let it all be consecrated to the Lord for the glory of his name, and for the welfare of his Church and people. Let us not be indulging vain excuses, and saying, '*This* will require sacrifices, which I am unwilling to make: *that* will require abilities which I do not possess.' What sacrifice is there beyond that of life? Even *that* it is our duty to make for the world and for the Church; and therefore every subordinate sacrifice should be of no account. And as for talents and abilities, if only we will use those which we have, God will glorify himself by them, and render them subservient to the welfare of mankind, if only we will endeavour to improve them with diligence, and to exercise them with fidelity.

You see what God would have us both to *be* and *do*: he would have us overwhelmed with a sense of his love to us, and abounding in the most self-denying exercises of love to

ⁱ Phil. ii. 17.

all mankind. Come, brethren, gird yourselves to the occasion. Your God and Saviour demands it at your hands. The whole universe also joins in one common cry, "Come over to us, and help us." And he who most abounds in offices of love to others, shall receive the richest recompence into his own bosom from that God whose name and nature is "Love."]

MMCCCCXLIX.

NO LOVE TO GOD WITHOUT LOVE TO MAN.

1 John iii. 17. *Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

UNDER the law there were two great commandments: the first was, to love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and the second was, to love our neighbour as ourselves. And under the Gospel they are still in force, or rather, I should say, are enjoined more emphatically than ever, being enforced with new motives, so as to bear the stamp and character of "a new commandment^a." They are on no account to be separated in our practice and regards; neither can one be obeyed without the other. True, indeed, many will flatter themselves that they obey the one, whilst they are notoriously regardless of the other. But they only deceive their own souls: and *this* so palpably, that the Apostle appeals to the offenders themselves, and makes them judges in their own cause: "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" He may pretend to love God; but the love of God is not in him: for "if he does not love his brother whom he hath seen, he can never truly love God whom he hath not seen^b;" and consequently he is destitute of all religion.

In confirmation of this truth, I shall shew,

I. That he can have no true piety, who is destitute of love to God—

^a 1 John ii. 7, 8.

^b 1 John iv. 20.

The Apostle takes this truth for granted; and makes it the foundation of his appeal. But I lament to say, that it needs to be brought home to our consciences with more force than we are wont to assign to it in our own minds.

That God deserves our love, cannot be denied—

[View him *in his works of creation*. No sooner had he formed every thing, than he pronounced it “very good.” See *man* in his compound state both of body and soul: how fearfully and wonderfully are we formed in our corporeal frame! — — — and with what astonishing powers are our souls endued, insomuch that we are capable of appreciating in a measure all that we behold with our eyes, and can soar also to the contemplation of the invisible God himself, and are capable of knowing, loving, serving, and enjoying him.

Behold *the earth* and all that it contains; how formed for the service and the use of man! — — — Yea, and *all the heavenly bodies also*, how do they too in their orbits (for in all probability the whole solar system forms but a part of other systems, with which it moves) administer to the comfort and happiness of man!

And is not the Creator of all this worthy of our love? — — — View him *in his works of providence*. All this has God upheld, if not in its primeval grandeur, yet in its ministrations to the good of man; and *that* too notwithstanding all the provocations which he receives continually at our hands. All our faculties both of body and mind are continued to us — — — whilst the whole terraqueous globe affords us sustenance, and the heavenly bodies, according to their capacities, minister to our necessities and comforts. True, the world was once drowned with water; and the cities of the plain were consumed with fire: but this only shews us what might have been daily expected, if God had dealt with us in any respect according to our deserts.

Should not then such a long-suffering and gracious God be made an object of our most intense regard?

But view him in his great work, *the work of redemption*: and what shall we say of him there? View him as taking our very nature, and becoming in all things like unto us, sin only excepted. View him as dying upon the cross, and expiating our guilt by the sacrifice of himself — — — View him as sending down from heaven his Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts, and by his enlightening, quickening, transforming energies, to render the work of Christ effectual for the salvation of all who will believe in him — — — But here I seem to exceed the utmost bounds of credibility. Yet so it is; and this is the God who

calls us to set our love on him. What then shall I say of the man who complies not with this reasonable demand? I appeal to you, my brethren, whether such a man, supposing such an one could be found, can have any true religion?

Perhaps you will say, It is impossible that such a monster should exist. Then let us submit the matter to a test, the test proposed to us by the Apostle himself.]

To do this, we affirm,

II. That he can have no true love to God, who is destitute of love to man—

Love to God must of necessity comprehend in it these three things: a regard for his authority; gratitude for his mercies; and zeal for his glory. Let us see then whether the man who “shuts up his bowels of compassion from his fellow-creatures,” has any one of these? Has he,

1. Any regard for God’s authority?

[God most solemnly enjoins under the Old Testament compassion for our indigent brother, and a willingness to relieve him^c — — — He requires the same under the New Testament^d — — — He informs us who the person is to whom we are to manifest this love, even every child of man^e — — — He tells us from whom he expects this grace, even from the poor, who are constrained to get their own living by manual labour, as well as from the rich and great^f — — — He has enforced this duty by every kind of argument: by promises the most engaging^g — — — and by threatenings the most tremendous^h — — — He has declared that it shall form his rule of judgment in the last day, and determine our eternal destiniesⁱ — — —.

Now then what regard can he have to God’s authority who lives in the neglect of this duty? He says, in fact, My goods are my own, and I will dispose of them as I please: and, “as for God, I know him not; neither will I obey his voice.”]

2. Any gratitude for his mercies?

[Our blessed Lord, reminding us what temporal blessings his heavenly Father bestows upon us, calls us to an imitation of him in our conduct towards our fellow-men, that so we may approve ourselves as his children by our resemblance to him^k — — —

^c Deut. xv. 7—11. Cite this at large.

^d 1 John iv. 21.

^e Luke x. 29—37.

^f Eph. iv. 28. Acts xx. 34, 35.

^g Isai. lviii. 7, 8.

^h Jam. ii. 13.

ⁱ Matt. xxv. 34, 41, 46.

^k Matt. v. 44, 45, 48.

Still more particularly is his redeeming love proposed to us in this view both as a motive and a pattern; a motive which we should in no wise withstand^l; and a pattern which to the very utmost we should follow, even to “the laying down of our lives for the brethren^m.” To stimulate us to it the more, he tells us, that he will receive every thing as done to himselfⁿ; that he will account himself our debtor for it^o; and that he will submit to be accounted “unrighteous” if he fail to acknowledge and reward it in the last day^p. For our further encouragement he assures us, that, however light we may think of such a service, it is “a sacrifice with which he is well pleased^q.”

Now if all this do not prevail with us to shew kindness to our brethren, what shall we say? Have we any gratitude to God? No; we are more stupid and senseless than the beasts themselves^r — — —]

3. Any zeal for his glory?

[We are commanded to “make our light shine before men, that those who behold it may be constrained to glorify our Father which is in heaven^s.” And our Lord assures us, that “herein is the Father glorified, when we bring forth much fruit^t,” yea, that “all our fruits of righteousness are by him to the glory of God the Father^u.” But in a more particular manner is our liberality to the saints spoken of in this view, inasmuch as it calls forth “abundant thanksgivings to him” from the persons relieved, and causes them to glorify God for our professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ, the proper tendency of which is to generate these heavenly dispositions, and to augment the happiness of all mankind^x — — —

Now suppose a man to neglect this duty, what zeal can he have to promote the glory of his God? He may fancy himself religious; but he has no more love to God than Satan himself; for, if “faith without works is no better than the faith of devils,” the religion of such a man is no better than the religion of devils^y. For so hath God said: “In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, *neither he that loveth not his brother^z*.”]

Let me now ADD,

1. A word of caution—

^l 2 Cor. viii. 7—9.

^o Prov. xix. 17.

^r Isai. i. 2, 3.

^u Phil. i. 11.

^y Jam. ii. 17—19.

^m ver. 16.

^p Heb. vi. 10.

^s Matt. v. 16.

^x 2 Cor. ix. 12—14.

^z 1 John iii. 10.

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 40.

^q Heb. xiii. 16.

^t John xv. 8.

[It is easy to mistake alms-deeds for *Christian* liberality. But the Apostle cautions us against all such mistakes^a— — — Nothing is truly *Christian* but what proceeds from love to God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, and is done for the advancement of his glory — — —]

2. A word of encouragement—

[Abound in this duty, and it shall bring a rich reward^b— — —]

^a ver. 18. We should draw forth not our money only, but *our soul*, to the hungry. Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

^b 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

MMCCCCL.

A GOOD AND EVIL CONSCIENCE.

1 John iii. 20, 21. *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

IN the description given us of the day of judgment, we are informed that the Judge will be seated on his throne; that certain books will be opened; and that sentence will be passed on every one according to what was recorded in them^a. Such a tribunal there is, already erected in the bosoms of men. Conscience is seated there as supreme judge: it keeps an account of every day's transactions: it summons men to its bar: it exhibits the record before their eyes; and, in perfect correspondence with their actions, it passes on them its authoritative sentence. Thus it anticipates the future judgment, and forces men to read in its decisions their final doom. To this effect the Apostle speaks in the passage before us; in elucidating which, we shall shew,

I. How far the testimonies of our conscience may be depended on—

The testimonies of conscience are not always just—

[With many there is a *sleepy* conscience, which suffers men to go on in their own ways without shame, and without

^a Rev. xx. 12.

remorse. So inactive and so callous is this faculty within them, that it is justly represented as “seared with a hot iron^b.” Indeed, if it were not thus with them, how could they go on so cheerfully as they do, in an open course of sin, or in a wilful neglect of God?

With many also there is a *partial* conscience. They discern what is wrong in others, but not in themselves: or they notice some evils, but not others. Herod would not violate his oath; but he would murder a prophet^c. And the Pharisees would not put into the treasury the money that was the price of blood; but they would persist in persecuting the innocent Jesus even unto death^d. And such a conscience have many amongst ourselves: it would be clamorous if they were to commit some flagrant enormity; while it bears no testimony at all against secret lusts, or against any evils which are sanctioned by an ungodly world.

With some also there is an *erroneous* conscience. St. Paul “thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus^e,” and would have stood condemned in his own mind, if he had not laboured to the uttermost to extirpate the Christian name. And our Lord has told us that many would “think they did God service by killing” his faithful followers^f. Doubtless there are many who, both in civil and religious actions, are instigated by (what we may call) a good principle, while yet a clearer view of their duty would represent those actions in a very different light.

There is also with many a *scrupulous* conscience. They both do and forbear many things from a sense of duty, when the things themselves are altogether indifferent in the sight of God. Thus it was with those who were afraid to eat meats that had been offered to idols, or who observed the times and seasons that had been prescribed in the Mosaic law^g. Superstition indeed is less common in this age: yet wherever the mind is tinctured with it, there will arise many occasions of condemnation or acquittal in a man’s own mind, when the sentence passed is altogether founded in an ignorance of Christian liberty, or Christian duty.

Hence it is evident that conscience may condemn when it ought to acquit, and acquit when it ought to condemn.]

Its sentence, however, is always just, when it accords with the Holy Scriptures—

[The Scriptures are an infallible standard, to which every thing may be referred, and by which its quality may be determined. In order therefore to ascertain whether the testimonies

^b 1 Tim. iv. 2.

^c Matt. xiv. 9.

^d Matt. xxvii. 3—6, 20.

^e Acts xxvi. 9.

^f John xvi. 2.

^g Rom. xiv. 2, 3, 5, 6.

of conscience be just, we should try them by this touchstone. We should learn from the sacred volume what are the leading features of conversion; what is essential to the Christian character; and what, though wrong in itself, will consist with real integrity. When we have thus attained an adequate knowledge of *the rule* of duty, and our conscience judges by that rule in estimating our conduct, then may we safely acquiesce in its determinations, and conclude it to be right, whether it acquit or condemn.

There is, however, and ever must be, more credit due to its sentence when it condemns, than when it acquits; because, in condemning, it may have respect to any single act, and found its sentence on that, without the smallest danger of mistake: but, in acquitting, it must comprehend the whole circle of a Christian's duty, and testify that, on the whole, there is no allowed deviation from it. Here therefore is great scope for error; insomuch that St. Paul himself, though he knew of no allowed evil in himself, would not be too confident respecting his state; but committed himself to the judgment of a merciful and gracious God^h.]

To procure a just attention to its voice, we proceed to shew,

II. The benefit and comfort of having its testimony in our favour—

Nothing is more terrible than an accusing conscience. Its testimonies are,

1. A source of present distress—

[When God gives it a commission to scourge a man, it executes the office with great effect. How did it increase the troubles of Joseph's brethrenⁱ; and torture the soul of the unguarded Darius^k; and appal the impious Belshazzar, so that his knees smote one against the other^l! How did it make Felix tremble on the seat of judgment^m! and Judas actually to become his own executionerⁿ! When it operates with a just and salutary influence, it will force the most obdurate to cry out with anguish^o, and the most confident to weep with great bitterness^p.

Many amongst ourselves perhaps have felt its stings, till we have groaned in our spirit, and even "howled upon our bed," anticipating, and almost tasting, the bitterness of hell itself^q.]

^h 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

ⁱ Gen. xlii. 21.

^k Dan. vi. 18—20.

^l Dan. v. 6.

^m Acts xxiv. 25.

ⁿ Matt. xxvii. 5.

^o Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 29, 30.

^p Luke xxii. 62.

^q Heb. x. 27.

2. A pledge of eternal misery—

[When conscience is enlightened, it sees innumerable abominations in the heart: and when sanctified, it feels an utter abhorrence of what it does see. But yet “God is greater than our hearts” both in respect of penetration to discover sin, and of holiness to hate it. He “knoweth all things” that have been done amiss, and *that* too, with all the particular aggravations that have attended every omission of duty, and every commission of iniquity. Not our actions only, but our very thoughts, are “sealed up in his bag,” to be brought forward against us at the last day^r. The present testimonies of conscience are a previous and preliminary sentence, declaring *now* upon few and partial grounds, what God himself will *hereafter* declare on a complete review of our whole lives.

We say not indeed that there is no room for repentance: God forbid: the accusations of conscience are the voice of God within us, calling us *to* repentance: and the most guilty conscience that ever tormented the soul of man, may in an instant be purged by the blood of Jesus^s: but if conscience summon us to its bar, as God summoned Adam and Cain to answer for their conduct^t, its decisions shall be ratified in the day of judgment, unless they be reversed through penitence and faith in Christ: what it “binds on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and what it looses on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”]

Nothing, on the other hand, is a richer blessing than a good conscience: its testimonies are,

1. A source of unspeakable comfort—

[St. Paul tells us that he found this to be a well-spring of happiness within him; “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world^u.” Indeed, such a testimony is a continual feast to every one that enjoys it. Having an inward witness of our own sincerity, we may “assure our hearts before God^x,” we may “have boldness of access to him with confidence^y,” we may “ask of him what we will, and it shall be done unto us^z.” Such a testimony inspires a “confidence towards God” in every thing that relates to our present or future welfare; it fills the soul with a “peace that passeth all understanding,” “a joy that is unspeakable and glorified.” How desirable then is it to be able *now* to appeal to God, like

^r Job xiv. 17.

^s Heb. x. 22. and 1 John i. 7.

^t Gen. iii. 9. and iv. 9, 10.

^u 2 Cor. i. 12.

^x ver. 19.

^y Eph. iii. 12.

^z ver. 22.

Job, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked^a;" or with Peter, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee^b!" And how blessed to say with Hezekiah *in a dying hour*, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight^c!"

2. An earnest of eternal happiness—

[The witness of our conscience is, in fact, the witness of the Spirit of God^d: for it is the result of a *divine illumination*, whereby we discern the agreement of our experience with the word of God, and of a *divine communication*, rendering that agreement an occasion of joyful confidence. What then can this be but a foretaste of that bliss which shall be consummated in heaven? In this view these divine communications may be considered as "the first-fruits of the Spirit," and "the earnest of the Spirit;" because they are, as it were, the beginnings of heaven in the soul, and they assure to us a complete and everlasting possession of it. Even in the day of judgment itself this holy confidence will remain^e: they who possess it now, will go forth with joy to meet the bridegroom; "they will stand before him with great boldness^f," and, assured of their relation to him, will exclaim, "This God is our God for ever and ever."]

INFER—

1. How careful should we be in every part of our conduct!

[Every thing we do is written in the book of God's remembrance; and our own consciences will hereafter, if not now, attest the truth of God's testimony. How anxious then should we be, that every day and every hour should record something good, rather than what will distress us in the day of judgment! Let us then beg of God to "put truth in our inward parts:" let us exercise ourselves day and night to keep a "conscience void of offence both towards God and man^g:" and let us say with Job, "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live^h."]

2. How attentive should we be to the voice of conscience!

[Conscience, if we would listen to it, would tell us many plain and wholesome truthsⁱ. If we would submit to its

^a Job x. 7.

^b John xxi. 17.

^c Isai. xxxviii. 3.

^d Some think these are two distinct witnesses: but perhaps *this* is the more just view of the matter. See Disc. on Rom. viii. 16.

^e 1 John iv. 17.

^f Wisd. v. 1.

^g Acts xxiv. 16.

^h Job xxvii. 6.

ⁱ Rom. ii. 15.

reproofs, it would keep us from much evil, and lead us safely to heaven. Let none of us then stifle it, or bribe it, or despise it: but let us rather get it well informed, and cherish with care its salutary admonitions. Let us carefully conform ourselves to its dictates^k," and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged of the Lord^l."]]

3. How thankfully should we bathe in the fountain of Christ's blood!

[There is not a day or an hour wherein conscience does not contract some defilement: nor is there a probability of pacifying it, but by continual applications to "the blood of sprinkling." Let us then rejoice that there is "a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;" and let it be our care day and night to cleanse ourselves in it from every fresh contracted stain. If we neglect this, "our mind and conscience will be defiled^m;" but if we "abide in him, we shall have confidence in expectation of his appearance; nor shall we be ashamed before him at his comingⁿ."]]

^k Acts xxiii. 1.

^l 1 Cor. xi. 31.

^m Tit. i. 15.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 28.

MMCCCCLI.

FAITH IN CHRIST ENJOINED.

1 John iii. 23. *This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.*

SOME Christians, from a mistaken zeal for the Gospel, are ready to associate the idea of *legality* with the very mention of the term "commandment;" forgetting that the commandments, if obeyed from love, are of the very essence of the Gospel; obedience to them being its necessary fruit, its appropriate end, its highest glory. St. John had as ardent a love to the Gospel, and as vigilant a jealousy for its honour, as Paul himself: yet does he lay the greatest stress on an obedience to the commandments, saying, in the very words before my text, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of God, *because we keep his commandments*, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." But the very Gospel itself is here presented to us under that character, as much as "love" itself, which is the sum and substance of the law:

“This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” In fact, the Gospel should be particularly endeared to us under this character. And, that it may be so, I will set before you,

I. The duty here commended to us—

If faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a grace bestowed^a, so is it also a duty enjoined. We are commanded of God,

1. To receive Christ as he is revealed in the Gospel—

[He is spoken of as the person foretold from the beginning of the world, “the Seed of the woman,” “the Seed of Abraham,” “the Shiloh,” “the Son of David,” the Virgin’s child, the Messiah that was to come. And it is our bounden duty, after comparing the history of the New Testament with the records of the Old, to receive him under this character.

But he is said also to sustain certain offices corresponding with the typical representations of him under the Mosaic economy. He was to be “a Prophet like unto Moses;” he was to fulfil and execute also all the services of the priesthood; and he was to “sit on the throne of David,” as King over his Church and people. In all these views, then, we must inspect his pretensions: and from all that we read concerning him, we must be convinced, that in him were all these offices united; that he is indeed the Prophet, who has revealed to us the mind of God; the Priest also, that has offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men; and the King, that will bring the whole world under his sceptre, and reign unto the very ends of the earth.

In a word, he is declared to be a Saviour, the only Saviour of our fallen race. And, from all that he wrought for the bodies of men in healing all manner of diseases, and from the effects which he produced also upon their souls, both during his sojourning on earth, and after his ascension to heaven, we must thankfully acknowledge him under that endearing character; and confess him, as the Samaritan converts did, “This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world^b.”]

2. To depend upon him for all the blessings which he is commissioned to bestow—

^a Eph. ii. 8. Phil. i. 29.

^b John iv. 42.

[A speculative acknowledgment of Christ, without a practical application to him for all the benefits of his salvation, will be of little use. The offices he sustains have respect to the necessities of fallen man: and under a sense of our need, we must look to him to fulfil those offices for us. Is he a Prophet? We must look to him to instruct us by his word and Spirit, and to guide us into all truth. Is he a Priest? We must rely on the atonement which he has offered for us, and seek, through his prevailing intercession, all those good things which he has purchased for us, and which God, for his sake, is ever ready to bestow. Is he a King? We must put ourselves altogether under his government and protection, and live only for the glory of his great name. We must renounce every other hope, and rely on him for every thing; looking to him, and to him only, as “our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption.” In a word, “the life which we now live in the flesh, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us.”]

But, in contemplating this duty, I would call your attention particularly to,

II. The authority by which it is enjoined—

If to act faith on Christ were merely *conceded* to us *by permission*, it were a great and invaluable gift—

[Suppose the Israelites, when perishing with thirst, to behold the rock stricken, and the water gushing out like a river; would they need any *command* to drink of its refreshing streams? Would not a *permission* be amply sufficient? Methinks, if it had even been prohibited, they would have broken through the commandment, to slake their raging thirst. At all events, we are sure they would not have needed a *command* to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded them. Or let us take another supposition. There is, we are told there is, an impassable gulf between heaven and hell. But, suppose there were a bridge built over it, and an open door made into the highest heavens, and a free *permission* given to the fallen angels to escape from their dungeons, and to resume the thrones of glory from which they fell; how long, think ye, would they continue in their abodes of misery? Would so much as one of them need a *command* to leave his sad abode, and to return to the enjoyment of his primitive felicity? Then why should not a *permission* suffice for us? A *permission is given us*; “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.”

And what do any of you want more? Do you not need the waters of life as much as Israel ever did? And are you not under the same condemnation with the fallen angels? Yes, verily: the only difference between them and you is this, that they are already suffering the punishment of their sins; but over you the penalty is suspended, and only waiting the command of God to fall upon you to the uttermost. Surely, then, there should be in you the same anxiety to escape from the wrath to come; and a bare *permission* should suffice to induce you to embrace the salvation set before you in the Gospel.]

But what shall we say, if God has *recommended* to us this salvation in a way of *advice*?

[*This* he has done: “I *counsel* thee,” says our Lord, “to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see^d.” By the prophet, too, it is said, “Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? *Hearken diligently unto me*, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness^e.” Such was the advice given by St. Peter to those who, on the day of Pentecost, inquired, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” He bade them “repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins,” which, he assured them, should be conferred on all who followed his advice^f. And what was the effect? No less than three thousand persons instantly complied, and embraced with thankfulness the proffered benefit. So the jailer, when Paul gave the same advice to him in answer to a similar inquiry, arose immediately, and, with all his household, was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ^g. Why, then, should any of us delay? Why should any thing more than a mere word of *advice* be necessary for any one of us?]

But, alas! more *is* necessary: and therefore *God*, in tender mercy, has *enjoined* it in a way of *positive command*—

[Yes, this is his *commandment*, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ. *We are averse* to this humiliating way of salvation, and, if we dared, would eternally reject it. But God sent us this solemn warning, that, “if we believe in

^d Rev. iii. 18.

^f Acts ii. 37—39.

^e Isai. lv. 1, 2.

^g Acts xvi. 30—33.

Christ, and are baptized in his name, we shall be saved: but that, if we believe not, we shall assuredly and eternally be damned^h." And even after we are made, in a measure, willing to embrace this salvation, we are apt to *put it from us*, under an idea that we are unworthy of it, and that it were presumption in us to appropriate to ourselves so rich a boon. But God silences at once all objections of this kind. He leaves us not at liberty even to deliberate upon the subject. He tells us plainly, that "as long as we continue in unbelief, we are in a state of condemnation, and that his wrath abideth on usⁱ." And he further informs us, that there is but "one way of salvation^k," "one only foundation" whereon to build our hopes^l; and that the embracing or rejecting of that Saviour will determine our eternal state; since "there is life in Christ alone; and he only who hath the Son of God, hath life; whereas he who hath not the Son of God, hath not life^m," nor can by any possibility obtain it in any other way than by faith in himⁿ.

Behold then, brethren, what the duty is that is here enjoined; and know, that it will be at the peril of your souls to disobey it.]

SEE, then,

1. What a merciful command this is—

[Suppose that God had commanded us to make compensation for our past iniquities, and to earn his favour by a course of perfect obedience; who amongst us could ever have entertained the slightest hope of mercy at his hands? Or suppose that he had required us to do so much as one single act that should *merit* his favour? Who amongst us must not have been cast down in utter despair? But all he requires is, that we should receive thankfully what he offers freely. So far as respects every thing for the removal of our guilt, or for the providing of a perfect righteousness for us, all *that* is wrought for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and is offered to us as a free gift from God. O beloved, what an unspeakable mercy is this! O! never turn your backs on this salvation! for, "how shall ye escape, if ye reject it?" It is precisely such as your necessities require; and, if ye will but accept it as the free gift of God to your souls, it shall be yours for ever.]

2. What inconceivable benefit will flow from your obedience to it—

[In the words following my text there is another command connected with it; namely, that "we should love one another, as he gave us commandment." But this, in fact, is

^h Mark xvi. 16.

ⁱ John iii. 18, 36.

^k Acts iv. 12.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^m 1 John v. 11, 12.

ⁿ John xiv. 6.

the fruit, of which the other is the root. True "faith will invariably work by love^o:" so that, not only will salvation be secured to us by faith; but holiness also, in all its sublimest branches, will be wrought in us. Those who object to salvation by faith, do so under an apprehension that it will leave us regardless of moral duties. But I ask, where is love found in any degree in comparison of that which is produced by faith? Where, since the foundation of the world, was holiness in all its branches seen, in comparison of that which shined forth in the Apostles and in all the primitive saints? I say then, that *in this view*, the exercise of faith is of inestimable value. But who shall declare the benefits resulting from it in the eternal world? Who shall make known to us all that is implied in "obtaining the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory^p?" My dear brethren, be thankful that these blessings are yet offered to your acceptance; and pray earnestly to your God, that you fall not short of them through unbelief.]

^o Gal. v. 6.

^p 2 Tim. ii. 10.

MMCCCCLII.

THE MUTUAL IN-DWELLING OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

1 John iii. 24. *He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.*

THERE is, in the Epistles of St. John, a most remarkable simplicity, insomuch that he seems to speak truths level with the comprehension of a little child: yet is there in him a vast profundity of sentiment, which no common mind can fathom. Not that he establishes his points by laboured argumentation. He does not offer himself to the bar of reason; but, conscious of his own inspiration, he requires the submission of human reason to his dictates. In my text, he asserts truths of the deepest import; namely, the mutual in-dwelling of God in his people, and of his people in him; and the consciousness which God's people have of this mystery being realized in their own experience. These are things of which men in general have very little conception: but, on the authority of this holy Apostle, I will proceed to shew,

I. The exalted privilege of God's people—

The character of God's people is here declared, in very simple terms—

[“ He that keepeth God's commandments” is the person to whom the privilege belongs. Not that any man can keep them perfectly : but the true Christian does desire to fulfil them in their utmost extent; and, allowing for human infirmity, he does keep them uniformly, and without reserve. He would not exclude one command from the Decalogue, or contract its import in any respect.

But the commandments here more especially referred to, are those of faith and love. In the preceding verse these are particularly specified. “ This is *his commandment*, that we should *believe* on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and *love* one another, as he gave us *commandment*.” Now, certainly, these are the two commandments, which, above all others, serve as a test, whereby to try the Christian character; and obedience to them is that by which the Lord's people are *universally* and *exclusively* distinguished. They are known by it *universally* : for there is not a Christian upon earth who does not live simply by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; or who does not love, with a peculiar and transcendent affection, all whom he supposes to belong to Christ. On the other hand, this character belongs to them *exclusively* : for there is no other person in the universe who so entirely relies on Christ, or who so pre-eminently regards the mystical members of his body.]

Of these it is said, that “ God dwells in them, and they in him”—

[There is between God and them an union which does not exist in the whole world besides. Perhaps, the union of light with the air which it pervades, is the closest that will be found in nature : but, though the light pervades every particle of the air, and dwells in it, we cannot say that the air dwells in the light. But the in-dwelling of God and his people is mutual; he abiding in them, and they in him. Of course, however, this must be understood, not as relating to the essential natures of God and man, but only to a mystical communion subsisting between them; God dwelling in them, in a way of vital operation; and they in him, in a way of implicit affiance. God has repeatedly promised that he will dwell in his people by his good Spirit; enlightening their minds, sanctifying their souls, and filling them with heavenly consolations. In truth, this is the very office which the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, sustains in the economy of redemption : and it is in this way that he applies to

us all that the Lord Jesus has purchased for us. We, on the other hand, in the exercise of faith and love, ascend, as it were, to heaven, and deposit all our cares in the very bosom of our God: so that it is “not so much *we* that live, as *Christ* that liveth in us^a,” “our life being hid with Christ in God,” and “Christ himself being our very life^b.” I grant, that to a mere nominal Christian all this will appear little better than mystical absurdity, and enthusiastic jargon. But true it is, whether men will believe it or not: and, if its being incomprehensible by us be any reason for denying it, we must, on the same principle, deny the existence and operation of our souls within our corporeal frame. It is not on one or two insulated passages that this great mystery is founded: it is declared again and again, in terms too plain to be denied, and too numerous to admit of doubt^c.]

Nor is this a mere theory, demanding their assent: for my text further declares,

II. The assured sense which they may possess of their own personal interest in it—

This mutual in-dwelling may be perceived and known: “it may be known,” as the Apostle tells us, “by the Spirit which God hath given us.” It may be known,

1. By the operation of the Holy Spirit within us—

[The Holy Spirit is given unto us as “a Spirit of adoption, whereby we are enabled to cry, Abba, Father^d.” He is given to us as a witness, to “witness with our spirits that we are the children of God^e.” He is given to us as “a seal^f,” to mark us as God’s property; and to produce such an impression on our souls, that we may know, and that others also may know, “whose we are, and whom we serve.” He is given unto us as “an earnest of our heavenly inheritance^g,” that we may have already the foretaste of heaven in our souls. Now, how can these operations proceed within us, and we not be conscious of them? It is to no purpose to say that the world knows nothing about them: for our blessed Lord has promised, that “he will manifest himself unto us as he does not unto the world:” and it is by these very operations that he makes to us this glorious discovery: “Lord,” said one of his Apostles, “how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, as thou dost not unto the world? And Jesus answering said

^a Gal. ii. 20.

^c John vi. 56. xiv. 20. 1 John iv. 16.

^e Rom. viii. 16.

^b Col. iii. 3, 4.

^d Rom. viii. 15.

^g Eph. i. 14.

^f Eph. i. 13.

unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him ; and *we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^h.*”]

2. By the very works which that Holy Spirit produces in us—

[David prayed, “ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right *spirit within meⁱ.*” And St. James says, “ *The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy^k.*” And in this sense we may understand our text: “ We know that he abideth in us, by the *spirit which he hath given us*; that is, we know the *cause by the effects*. Now, consider the effects, as before contemplated. We perceive not only the manifestations of God’s love to us, but the drawing of our souls to him; so that in the habit of our minds we are going forth to him, and delighting ourselves in him. Is this the fruit of *nature*? Can it have proceeded from any power, but that of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us? Will any one see iron suspended in the air, and not refer it to the magnet? Be assured, when such an effect as this exists, we can trace it to no other source than the agency of the indwelling Spirit within us. Again; the disposition to obey the commandments of the Lord, and especially the sublime commandments of faith and love—is *this* of man? is the *desire* from man? How much less, then, can the *attainment* be? No, verily: “ it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure:” and when we have in ourselves the evidence that we are “ *keeping* these commands,” we may as well doubt who it was that formed the universe, as who the Author is of the work that has been wrought within us. We must say, “ He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God^l.”]

Permit me to IMPRESS this subject more fully upon you,

1. In a way of complaint—

[There is great reason to complain of the world at large, for deriding these things as enthusiasm, when they will not examine the grounds on which they are founded. I will grant, that, never having experienced any thing of the kind in their own souls, they can have no just conception of them. But they might read the Scriptures: they might see what the inspired writers have spoken; and what was the recorded experience of the primitive saints. If persons in a tropical climate were to deny the existence or properties of congealed water, it would be no proof at all that there are not mountains

^h John xiv. 22, 23.

^k Jam. iv. 5.

ⁱ Ps. li. 10.

^l 2 Cor. v. 5.

of ice, capable of breaking, by concussion, the largest ship. As well might children deny what their fathers have known by experience, as ignorant and ungodly men denounce as visionary what truly converted characters know to be true. To those, then, who with ignorant incredulity ask, Can such things be? I would answer, with Philip to Nathanael, "Come and see^m." Come to the Holy Scriptures, and you shall find them there: and come to God himself, in the exercise of faith and love; and you shall find the experience of them in your own bosoms.]

2. In a way of caution—

[There are two errors, against which I would most affectionately guard you all: the one is, against professing this assurance on inadequate grounds; and the other is, against the maintaining of this assurance in an unhallowed way. There are persons who conceive that God dwelleth in them, because they have had some dreams or visions to that effect. But I apprehend that Satan himself is not capable of suggesting any more fatal delusion than this. And I must declare unto you, that he who builds his hopes on dreams or visions, will find his hope, and his religion too, no better than a dream or vision at last. It is from the spirit that God has given us, and not from a dream or vision, that we are to gather our interest in God: and I entreat you to satisfy yourselves with no evidences, but such as are plain, obvious, incontrovertible.

There are others who, professing to have God abiding in them, manifest a spirit altogether opposite to that which would result from a divine agency—a spirit of pride and self-preference, a spirit of moroseness and bigotry, a spirit of unwatchfulness and security. The presumptuous boldness of these persons is perfectly appalling: one is shocked to hear such unfeeling language as will proceed from their lips, and to behold such unhumiliated confidence as they will venture to express. But I entreat you, brethren, never thus to pervert the word of God, and never thus to abuse the sacred truths of his Gospel. Remember, I pray you, that whatever supersedes a holy fear, is of the devil; and whatever leads you to neglect a continued watchfulness, is no other than a damning delusion.]

3. In a way of encouragement—

[A person under the influence of temptation will not be able to behold in himself those evidences, which yet, in his life, are visible to all. Such an one may find in this passage nothing but an occasion of self-condemning fear. He may say, 'I do *not* keep the commandments of God, and therefore I

^m John i. 46.

know that I have no part or lot in this matter: and “the very spirit that is within me testifies that I have *not* God abiding in me.” But, my brethren, judge not yourselves too hardly. Do not suppose, that, because there are imperfections in your obedience, it is therefore not sincere; or that because the Spirit shines not upon you in full lustre, you shall never behold the light of day. Be content, at present, to want the consolations which God sees fit to withhold: and occupy yourselves with the pursuit of those things which, in God’s good time, will serve to prove what at the present you cannot see. Endeavour, in humble dependence upon God, to keep the commands of faith and love. Look to the Saviour, and live by faith in him: look to his peculiar people, and abound in all acts and offices of love to them. Look to the spirit and temper of your own minds altogether: and in the constant exercise of prayer seek the transformation of your souls into the Divine image. Then, though you be not able to see that God is in you, a foundation will be laid for the future discovery of it: or, though it should still, for wise and gracious purposes, be hid from you, you will have the benefit at a future day, when God will surely shine upon you, and “reward every man according to his works.” This is the advice given by the prophet, who says, “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord: his goings forth are prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earthⁿ.”]

ⁿ Hos. vi. 3.

MMCCCCLIII.

GOD AN EFFECTUAL HELP.

1 John iv. 4. *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

CONSIDERING the opposition made to Christianity in the apostolic age, it is surprising that it gained so speedy, so extensive, and so permanent a footing in the world. That its establishment was effected through miracles, there is no doubt: but miracles, unless attended with a divine power to the hearts of the beholders, could effect nothing. The very raising of Lazarus from the dead served only to embitter the minds of many against him who had effected it. That which gave energy to the word,

and caused it to work effectually for the conversion of men, was the power of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, after that men had embraced the Gospel, every possible method that Satan could devise was used to turn them from it: but millions maintained their steadfastness, even to the end: for, as St. John informs us, “greater was He that was in them than he that was in the world.”

This truth being still as important as ever, I shall,

I. Confirm the assertion as relating to former times—

“Great,” it must be confessed, “is he who is in the world”—

[“Many false prophets,” even whilst the Apostles were yet living, “had gone out into the world:” and great were the efforts which they made to turn men from the faith of Christ. Our blessed Lord had foretold that such persons would arise, and that their efforts would be productive of incalculable injury to his Church and people. “Many prophets shall arise, and deceive many.” “For there shall be false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before^a.” In accordance with this prediction, we find that “the faith of many was overthrown^b;” “whole houses were subverted^c,” and great multitudes were “turned back unto perdition^d.” At a future period we expect still more extensive ravages of the flock, through these wolves in sheep’s clothing^e: for the Spirit speaketh expressly, “that in the latter times some will depart from the faith; giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron^f.”

But it is Satan, in reality, that is the great agent in all these transactions: and the men who are more immediately engaged, are his instruments. In “these false apostles, these deceitful workers, who transform themselves into the Apostles of Christ, it is Satan himself transformed into an angel of light^g.” It is “the prince of the power of the air, even the evil spirit himself, who worketh in all those children of disobedience^h.”]

But “greater far is He who is in the Church”—

[“The strong man armed keepeth his palace, and his goods, for a time, in peace. But there is a stronger than he,

^a Matt. xxiv. 11, 24, 25. ^b 2 Tim. ii. 18. ^c Tit. i. 11.

^d Heb. x. 39.

^e Matt. vii. 15. ^f 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

^h Eph. ii. 2.

who comes upon him, and overcomes him, and takes from him his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoilsⁱ." He rescued millions from the dominion of that wicked one, and preserved them from the assaults of their cruel adversary. And "greater He still is," than that wicked fiend, and all his adherents.

He is greater in *wisdom*: for though the "devices" of Satan are inconceivably numerous, and "his wiles" beyond all conception subtle, yet he discerns them all, and knows how to counteract and defeat them all. He is greater also in *power*: for though Satan is "an angel that excels in strength," and has millions of wicked spirits, like unto himself, acting in confederacy with him, and under his special controul, He who sitteth in the heavens laugheth him to scorn; and says to him, "Hither shalt thou go, and no further." Earnest as Satan's desire was to destroy Job, he could effect nothing, till permitted by the Deity; and then could he not move an hair's breadth beyond his appointed bounds. Not even the herd of swine could he destroy, till he was liberated from the restraint which our Lord's superior power had imposed upon him.]

That we may improve the assertion for our own use, I will,

II. Confirm it as applicable to the present day—

The same wicked spirit works mightily in the world at this time—

[Various are the instruments he employs, and incessant are his exertions to destroy the souls of men.

He works *by open infidelity*. It is well known what efforts he has made throughout the whole of Europe, and with what prospects of success; insomuch that his agents boasted that they should soon crush our blessed Lord, and extinguish his religion. And in our own country, if the legal authorities had not interposed to uphold the laws, there is reason to fear that impiety and blasphemy would have filled every corner of our land.

He works, too, *by secret discouragements*. In every place, he assaults the souls of those who are desirous of being liberated from his dominion. He would persuade them that they are, on some ground or other, excepted from the general invitation to accept of mercy. They are not among the elect; or are too unworthy to obtain God's favour; or have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, so that their day of grace is passed. All such suggestions are for the purpose of effecting that in

ⁱ Luke xi. 21, 22.

individual characters, which, by infidel principles, he endeavours to accomplish on the community at large.

He works also *by specious admixtures*; mutilating and debasing the true Gospel, by confounding it with the law, and introducing into it terms subversive of its fundamental principles. It matters little to him, how he effects his purpose: if it be by a bold denial of all religion, or a desponding rejection of proffered mercy, or a perversion of the Gospel under a pretended zeal for good works, he equally attains his end: and therefore he varies his assaults according to the diversified characters of men, if by any means he may draw them from Christ, and finally effect their ruin.]

But a mightier power is in us also—

[God is still with his Church and people; and still worketh in them, “mighty to save.”

He is greater to instruct, than Satan is to deceive. The deepest of Satan’s devices he can unveil, to the very weakest of his people; and can overrule them for the accomplishing of his own gracious purposes towards them. Satan hoped, by destroying the Messiah, to subvert his kingdom: but God made it the very means of establishing that kingdom. It was “by death that our Lord overcame him that had the power of death;” and on the very cross he spoiled principalities and powers, “triumphing over them openly in it.”

He is greater also to uphold, than Satan is to cast down.—The efforts which Satan made to intimidate the Apostle Paul were such as appeared sufficient to daunt the strongest mind: but observe how God enabled his servant to triumph in every assault: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed: we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

He is greater too to save, than Satan is to destroy.—Satan would have “sifted Peter as wheat:” but God would “not suffer his faith to fail^k.” In the Epistle to the Church of Smyrna, it is said, “Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried: and ye shall have tribulation ten days^l.” Mark how Satan is here restrained. If he could have had his own will, he would have cast, not “some,” but *all*; not “into prison,” but *into hell*; not for “ten days,” but *for ever*. No “tribulation” short of that would satisfy his malignant mind. But “whereinsoever he, or his emissaries, deal proudly, our God is above them:” and the very means which he uses for our destruction will God make use of for the promoting and effecting of our salvation.]

^k Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^l Rev. ii. 10.

Two questions, we may suppose, you will be ready to ask :

1. How shall I know by which spirit I am moved ?

[This question is easily answered from the preceding context. We are bidden to “*try* the spirits, whether they be of God.” And this shews the propriety of suggesting the question before us. We have also the answer given : “ Hereby know ye the Spirit of God : every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God : and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God^m.” Here, then, is a plain test, by which the matter may be tried. Whoever, or whatever, would keep you from a total surrender of your souls to Christ, is from the devil : and whatever would lead you to it, is from God. All the false prophets before spoken of are antichrists : for “ there are many antichristsⁿ : ” and whatever be the particular line they adopt, their object is the same ; namely, to keep you from glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. But whatever means our God is pleased to use, his object is, that Christ should be glorified in us. This is the matter contested between God and Satan ; as St. Paul also explicitly declares : “ *The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto us. But God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^o.* ” This exactly accords with the testimony of St. John, and completely answers the question that has been proposed. Know then, that if infidelity would pervert you, or despondency discourage you, or self-righteousness deceive you, they have “ the mark of the beast upon them, as clear and visible as the sun at noon-day. The object of them all is, to keep you from Christ. But, whatever leads you to Christ, to believe in *him*, and serve *him*, and glorify *him*, you need no other evidence of its being from God. Reject therefore, with abhorrence, every anti-christian spirit : and receive with gratitude every motion which bears upon it the character and impress of your heavenly Father.]

2. How may I secure the final victory ?

[This also it is easy to answer : “ Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them ; *because* greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.” “ *They were of God,* ” and relied altogether upon him : and *therefore* they overcame. Do ye the same ; and the victory shall be yours also. Never

^m ver. 1—3.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 18.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.

will God forsake those who trust in him: never will he suffer Satan to “pluck one of them out of his hands.” He may leave them to endure many conflicts: but he will be with them, and succour them with great might, and make them “more than conquerors” over all their enemies. No one need to be discouraged on account of his weakness; for “God will perfect his own strength in their weakness.” “His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear.” Still is he as able, and as willing, to save his people as ever; “nor shall one of his little ones ever perish.” Look on your enemies then, my dear children, (*that* is the meaning of the word translated “*little* children:” it does not here refer to age or stature, but is a term of endearment, and is so used by our Lord himself to his disciples^p;) and say to every one of them, “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain^q.” Only “be ye of God;” and all the powers of darkness shall fall before you, and “Satan himself be bruised under your feet shortly^r.”]

^p John xiii. 33.

^q Zech. iv. 7.

^r Rom. xvi. 20.

MMCCCCLIV.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR.

1 John iv. 6. *Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.*

IN matters of eternal moment, every man must think for himself. We should take nothing upon trust; but bring to the test of Scripture the doctrines we hear, and the persons who profess to instruct us in the mind of God. This may appear presumptuous, in persons who have not made theology their peculiar study: but it is not presumptuous in any one who has the Scriptures in his hands, and a Divine Instructor to apply to. It was to the Church at large, and not to any particular person, that St. John said, “Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they be of God.” Even in the apostolic age, “many false prophets had gone out into the world:” and certainly there are not a few at this day, who, whilst they profess to preach the Gospel, hold forth an extremely erroneous standand of truth and duty. But the Gospel itself affords us a sufficient

test, whereby to try whatever is set before us. Moreover we should feel the same jealousy respecting ourselves, and use the same precautions in estimating our own character. There is “a spirit of truth;” but there is also “a spirit of error:” and the two may easily be mistaken for each other; and, through that mistake, a most erroneous judgment be formed of our conduct. To keep you from any such mistakes, I will shew,

I. The different spirits by which men are actuated—

There is, in some, “a spirit of truth”—

[In some there is a simplicity of mind, that desires nothing but what is right and true. They are open to conviction: they will weigh with candour whatever is set before them: they will not knowingly harbour any prejudices or prepossessions. They take pains to acquire knowledge: they, in particular, search into the fountain of all knowledge, the book of God: and, conscious of their need of divine instruction, they will look up to God for the teachings of his Spirit, and readily submit to whatever they find to be his revealed will. They are like Cornelius, who, though a heathen, hesitated not to send for Peter, who was a Jew, and to receive without gainsaying all that that divine instructor was commissioned to reveal.]

There is, in others, “a spirit of error”—

[There is in some a perverseness of mind, which, instead of affecting truth, loves rather paradox and disputation. There is in them an inaptitude to receive instruction. They have certain principles in their mind, which bias them on all subjects; and they have a certain pleasure in being singular. Things which are plain and obvious to others are not so to them, because their minds are fertile in supplying objections: to find which, they will travel far out of their road; and, having found them, they will lay a far greater stress on them than such trifling difficulties can in any way deserve. Hence, on almost all subjects, they are at issue with their nearest friends, unless indeed they have prevailed to draw others into the same vortex with themselves.]

But, as these imagine themselves to be influenced by a very opposite spirit, it will be proper for us to inquire,

II. How we are to discriminate between them—

As in natural substances we may, by a chemical process, discover of what they are compounded; so may we, by the application of certain tests, find how far the foregoing ingredients enter into the composition of our minds. In the context, two tests are proposed; namely, the world, and the Gospel; and by these "we may know" the two different spirits which we have been considering.

1. Take the world, then, as a test—

[If we have "a spirit of truth," there will be a readiness to see and acknowledge the vanity of all things here below. The whole world, and all that it contains, will appear to us lighter than vanity itself. Its views will appear erroneous in the extreme: its habits, altogether contrary to the mind of God. Eternity will be taken into the account in every estimate of the things of time; and every thing be viewed with a direct reference to that.

On the other hand, let the world be brought as a test to one who is blinded by "a spirit of error;" and how manifest will be the delusion under which he is labouring! He cannot see that the world is so vain or so mistaken as enthusiasts imagine: there is nothing so evil in its ways: its pursuits are highly rational; its pleasures altogether innocent; its friends and votaries in a state of acceptance with God. Nothing in it is to be condemned, except its excesses and its crimes. In a word, as the Pharisees "derided our Lord" when he spake of covetousness, because "they were covetous," so the man who is led by "a spirit of error" shuts his eyes against the plainest truths, and will admit nothing which thwarts his own worldly and carnal inclinations.]

2. Take the Gospel as a test—

[This is still more calculated to try the hidden dispositions of the soul. If we are actuated by a spirit of truth, we shall receive whatever God has spoken in his word, as little children. We shall not dispute against it, because it does not accord with our pre-conceived opinions; but shall rather form our opinions from it, than presume to sit in judgment upon it. The deepest truths which are there revealed will not offend us. It will be no stumbling-block to us, to find that God himself has become incarnate, and died upon the cross under the guilt of his creatures' sins: our only inquiry will be, Is this revealed? if it be, then is it true, whether we can understand it or not. Nor shall we be averse to the way of obtaining salvation simply by faith in Christ; because, if it be pointed out as the only way of access to God, and the only means of obtaining blessings

from him, then is it with all readiness and humility to be complied with, nor will a thought be suffered to rise against it. This is "the honest and good heart," which our blessed Lord commends as the proper soil wherein to sow the seed of life, and as the principle which we must cultivate with all possible care.

But far different will be the conduct of one who is carried away by "a spirit of error." The blessed word of God to him is rather a field wherein to exercise and display his own ingenuity. Nothing is acceptable to him that does not commend itself to his reason: he sits in judgment upon every thing, pronouncing this reasonable, and that unreasonable; and the great mystery of redemption, through the blood and righteousness of our incarnate God, he regards as foolishness. This is the spirit of Arians, and Socinians, and numberless others, who, instead of receiving the sacred oracles with the simplicity of a little child, deal with them as they would with a merely human composition; receiving what they like, merely because it accords with their own views, and rejecting all the rest as erroneous and absurd.

Thus by these tests we may distinguish "what spirit we are of." They call into action the hidden principles of the heart; and give occasion for the manifestation of them, in a way that is clear, and that admits of no doubt.]

Let me now proceed to mark,

III. The importance of distinguishing them aright—

A just discernment of these spirits will enable us,

1. To account for the conduct of others—

[It appears strange, at first sight, that a religion so worthy of God, and so suitable to man, as Christianity is, should not be readily received, and universally obeyed. How can it be, that its principles should be so generally controverted, and its practice so generally condemned? Is there any want of evidence, that the religion itself is from God? or, is there any thing really unreasonable in a life of faith and holiness? No: the fact is, that the pride of human nature is averse to receive a free salvation; and the corruption of human nature knows not how to bear the restraints which the Gospel imposes on it. Hence the spirit of man rises against the Gospel itself; and either fashions it to a standard of his own, or rejects it altogether, as unworthy to be received. Here then, at once, we see whence it is that worldlings continue worldly, and infidels retain their infidelity. They say in their hearts, "Who is lord over us? They hate to be reformed: "they hold fast deceit:" they shut their eyes against the light: they "cast God's

word behind them ;” and say, in effect, “ We will not have this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, to reign over us.” This explains that phenomenon which proves such a stumbling-block to Jews and Gentiles. They say, ‘ If your religion be so clear, whence is it that there is such a diversity of opinions respecting it?’ The answer is, ‘ Amongst those who are humble and contrite, there is no difference as to any fundamental part of doctrine, or practice: and, if there be amongst others, it is because they are led away by a “ spirit of error,” and “ blinded by the god of this world.”’]

2. To form a correct judgment of our own—

[To attain a knowledge of ourselves, we must diligently mark our own motives and principles of action. We see in others a bias; and we must observe how far there may be any undue influence upon our own minds. If we will candidly examine ourselves, we shall see that, in ten thousand instances, there is a leaning to *self*, through the workings of pride, or interest, or passion; and that, to be perfectly impartial in our views and actions, is an attainment of no common magnitude. To have no wish but to conform ourselves to the will of God, is a measure of grace that is but rarely found; so rare is “ a spirit of truth” in its full extent, and so prevalent “ a spirit of error.” Hence there is no man who has not occasion to humble himself for his defects; nor any who has not to watch continually against the deceitfulness of his own heart.]

Let me further IMPRESS this subject on your minds,
by adding,

1. A word of caution—

[The persons who most need to have this subject brought home to their own hearts, are the most backward to bestow a thought upon it; so blinded are they by the very evil against which they ought to guard. But I would affectionately remind them, that confidence in error will not make error cease to be what it is; and that a pertinacity in error may cause God to give them over to judicial blindness and hardness. We read, that “ God gives over some to a strong delusion, to believe a lie, that they may be damned, because they believe not the truth, but obey unrighteousness^a.” Their “ believing a lie” does not make it true; nor does its being “ a delusion” prevent their being “ damned” for yielding to it. O brethren! provoke not God so to abandon you; but beg of him to give you more simplicity of mind, and to put “ truth in your inward parts.”]

^a 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

2. A word of advice—

[You know, that in natural substances there are a great variety of component parts, which are hidden from the natural eye; but which, as we have before hinted, may, by a chemical process, be brought to view. By the application of certain tests, the parts may be separated, and new combinations of them be formed. In like manner, by the application of tests to your souls, you may discover the hidden principles of your hearts. See what it is to which your mind has an affinity: mark what it embraces; and what, on coming into contact with some other thing, it is disposed to relinquish. There are both “flesh and spirit” in the renewed man; and, by diligent observation of the way in which they are called into action, and of the degree in which they operate, you may ascertain your real character before God. If the world drives out spiritual considerations, and more tenaciously occupies the mind, you will see reason for self-abasement before God. If, on the contrary, the blessed truths of the Gospel readily fill your mind, and exclude the world, then have you reason for gratitude and thanksgiving. We are assured that “they who are after the flesh, do mind, and savour, the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” “Try then yourselves” by these tests, and “examine” carefully your state before God^b: for, “if your own heart condemn you, God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things; but if your heart condemn you not, then have you confidence towards God.”]

^b δοκιμάζετε, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. and again 1 Thess. v. 20.

 MMCCCCLV.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN GIVING HIS SON FOR US.

1 John iv. 9, 10. *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

OF all the endearing characters that are given us of God, that by which he is designated in the words immediately preceding our text, is the most comprehensive and most glorious; “God is love.” It might seem indeed that this appellation but ill-accorded with the sterner attribute of justice: but in the execution

of his wrath against impenitent transgressors, his love to the whole creation appears, no less than in his dispensations of grace and mercy to the penitent : even as the love of a judge towards the whole community appears in condemning a murderer, as much as in protecting the weak, or acquitting the innocent. There is however one exercise of his love which infinitely exceeds all others ; and that is, the gift of his only-begotten Son to die for us. This is the subject set before us in the text, and which the return of this day^a calls more especially to our remembrance.

Let us consider,

I. The love of God as it is here exhibited—

Instead of entering at large into the subject of our Saviour's incarnation, we shall confine ourselves strictly to the consideration of the Father's love in the different steps of it, as mentioned in the text. How astonishing is it,

1. That he should desire the restoration of our souls to life!

[Why should he ever entertain such a thought as this? Could we profit him at all? or would he suffer any loss by leaving us to perish? If he chose to have human beings to behold and participate his glory, could he not in an instant call forth millions into existence, and communicate to them the blessings we had forfeited? Had he determined that we should never fall, and that he would impose on us a necessity to continue in our primeval state, we should have the less wondered at his love: but that he should foresee our fall, and yet determine to restore us; that he should behold us actually fallen, and yet pity us; that, when our first parents fled from him, he should follow them with invitations to accept of mercy; and that, when they shifted off all blame from themselves, and cast it eventually even upon God himself, he should still retain his desire to save them; how amazing was this love! Had he proposed only to remit their punishment, and to blot out their existence, this had been a wonderful act of love: but to desire the restoration of such creatures to his favour, that they might live with him in glory for evermore, is truly such an exhibition of love, as far surpasses the utmost stretch of our conceptions. How differently did he act towards the angels,

^a Christmas-day.

when they fell! He never entertained a thought of restoring *them*^b: but, when *man* fell, then, as if he himself could not be happy without us, he concerted with his eternal Son to deliver us, and to save us with an everlasting salvation^c.]

2. That he should send his only-begotten Son into the world to effect this!

[What ways of accomplishing this object God *might* have found, it is not for us to say: but it is reasonable to believe, that nothing less than the incarnation of his only-begotten Son could effect it. And how wonderful it was that he should ever adopt such a measure as that! that he should spare his only dear Son from his bosom, and send him into a world that was already cursed by sin! that he should send him to assume our very nature; to be “made in the likeness of sinful flesh;” yea, to be made in all points like as we are, sin only excepted! However he might desire our recovery, it seems absolutely incredible that he should ever condescend to use such means to effect it: yet we are told that he actually did so; and that he sent, not an angel, not all the hosts of angels, but even “his only-begotten Son, into the world, that we might live through him^d.”]

3. That, in order to the effecting of it, he should make Him a propitiation for our sins!

[For the honour of God’s moral government, it was necessary that his hatred against sin should be made manifest, and that, if mercy were exercised towards fallen man, it should be only in a way that would consist with the rights of justice, and preserve the honour of God’s broken law. This could only be done by a vicarious sacrifice, a sacrifice of equal value with the souls of all mankind. Such a sacrifice could be made by none but our incarnate God; who therefore assumed our nature, that he might expiate sin by the sacrifice of himself, and make himself “a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” What love then was here; that God should send his only-begotten Son into the world for such an end as this! Had he sent him to instruct us by his doctrine and example, it had been a stupendous act of love: but to send him on purpose that he might bear our sins in his own body on “the tree,” and die in our stead, “the just for the unjust, to bring us to God;” this is a love that is utterly incomprehensible: it has heights and depths that can never be explored.]

To confirm this view of our subject, we need only call your attention to that assertion of St. Paul, that

^b Heb. ii. 16.

^c Zech. vi. 13.

^d John iii. 16.

“in this God *commendeth* his love to us;” and to that pious reflection of his, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things^e?” These passages abundantly prove, that, as the gift of Christ to us was the fruit of the Father’s love, so it was an instance of his love, that infinitely outweighs all else that he ever has done, or ever can do, for sinful man.

Let us now consider,

II. Our love to God as put in competition with it—

It is evidently supposed in our text that some might be blind and impious enough to ascribe their salvation rather to the love which they bore to God, than to that which, of his own free and sovereign grace, he bore to them. Hence the Apostle says, “Herein is love, *not that we loved God*, but that he loved us.” It is indeed surprising that any child of man should ever entertain such an idea as this which the Apostle explodes: but experience proves, that there is no merit so great, but man will arrogate it to himself; and no tribute so just, but he will refuse it to his God. We proceed then to notice this sentiment in a two-fold view:

1. The erroneousness of it—

[Let us for a moment inquire, What is the state of fallen man? Has he *of himself* any love to God? So far from it, we are told, that “the carnal mind is *enmity against* God; and that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be^f.” There is not any one thing relating to God, which the natural man loves: not his perfections; not his word; not his ordinances; not his people; not his ways: he is in his heart adverse to them all. But it may be said, that many are brought to love God at last. True: but how is this effected? by any power in man? or by any previous good inclination in man? No: “It is God that gives us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure^g:” it is “he, and he alone, that makes us to differ,” either from others, or from our former selves: we neither have any thing, nor can have any thing, but what we receive from him^h. How then can that which

^e Rom. v. 8. and viii. 32.

^g Phil. ii. 13.

^f Rom. viii. 7.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 7.

we receive from God be the *cause* or *ground* of his conferring it upon us?

The text, it is true, speaks of God's sending his Son into the world to die for us: and it may be thought, that no one would ascribe that gift to any merit of his own. We grant it: but, if men do not ascribe to their own merits the gift of a Saviour, they ascribe to their own merits the gift of *salvation* itself: yea, exceeding vehemently do they arrogate to themselves this honour: and when they are constrained to acknowledge, that in their unregenerate state they have done no good works to deserve salvation, they will maintain, that God has respect to some good which he *has foreseen* in them, and makes some natural or acquired excellence in them the *reason* and the *measure* of his favour towards them. But we can scarcely conceive any expressions more strong than those by which God cautions his people against this vain conceit. Hear what he said respecting it to his chosen people the Jewsⁱ — — — Hear also what Jesus said to his own immediate Disciples, who had certainly as good ground for boasting as any of us can have^k — — — Hear further what St. John says in a few verses after our text, and which is applicable, not to one age or people, but to the saints of God in every age; "We love him, *because he first loved us*^l." But indeed it is the voice of Scripture from one end to the other^m, that "God has mercy on whom he will have mercyⁿ," and that "there is a remnant according to the election of grace^o." To be making this truth a constant subject of our ministrations, as some do, is highly injudicious; but, when it comes fairly in our way, we must maintain it, as necessary for the abasing of man's pride, and for the exalting of God's honour and glory.]

2. The impiety of it—

[God is a jealous God: his very "name is Jealous^p," and "his glory he will not give to another^q." Now the great end for which he has redeemed man, was the advancement of his own glory. St. Paul, in the space of a few verses, repeats this almost to satiety, if we may so speak^r — — — But to ascribe the gift of a Saviour, or of salvation, either in whole or in part, to *our love to him*, is to rob him of his glory; and to establish a ground for glorying in ourselves, when he has declared, "that no flesh shall glory in his presence^s." Now, in reference to ourselves, we are backward to acknowledge that there

ⁱ Deut. vii. 7, 8. and ix. 4—6. and Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32.

^k John xv. 16. ^l ver. 19.

^m Jer. xxxi. 3. Eph. ii. 8, 9. 2 Tim. 1, 9.

ⁿ Rom. ix. 11, 15, 16. ^o Rom. xi. 5. ^p Exod. xxxiv. 14.

^q Isai. xlii. 8. ^r Eph. i. 5—7, 9, 11, 12, 14. and iii. 10, 11.

^s 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

is any great sin in this. Let us then transfer our thoughts to the fallen angels, and contemplate *them* as acting in this manner. They have sinned, as we have: and are as incapable of restoring themselves to the Divine favour, as we are: Let us then suppose God to say, 'I will send my only-begotten Son into those regions of misery, to bear their punishment, and to expiate their guilt: and I will send my Holy Spirit into their hearts, to change their natures, to renew them after my image, and to fit them for my presence.' Suppose, when God, of his own sovereign grace and mercy had done this, those wicked fiends should arrogate the glory to themselves, and say, 'God has saved us, because he foresaw what holy dispositions we should exercise, and how richly we should merit his favour;' What should we think of them? Should we not say, that their guilt was augmented ten-fold; and that the punishment they might expect would be proportionably severe? Where then is the difference between them and us? What have we, more than they, to merit the Divine favour? Or what can we have more than they, except it be given us from above? Know then, that, if God would burn with indignation against *them* for such pride and ingratitude, so will he against *us*, if we refuse to give him the glory due to his name. If Herod was made a monument of wrath for accepting from others a tribute due only to his God, much more shall we, if we, reversing what he has spoken, shall presume to say, "Herein is love, *not that God loved us, but that we loved him*, and earned by our love an interest in his favour."]

We conclude with some suitable ADVICE:

1. Contemplate frequently this love of God to you—

[The angels are not interested in the wonders of redemption as we are, and yet are ever "desiring to look into them." Shall *we* then be regardless of them? Shall we not search into them; and meditate upon them; and speak of them; and glory in them; and make them "all our salvation, and all our desire?" Shall we not especially consecrate to the contemplation of them this season which has been set apart by our Church for that express purpose? O make not this a time for carnal feasting, but for holy meditation, and for delight in God!]

2. Get your hearts filled with love to him—

[If our love be not the *cause*, it nevertheless should be the *consequence*, of his love to us. Of this, none can entertain a doubt. Who that is in the smallest degree impressed with the Saviour's love to us, does not see the reasonableness of that awful denunciation, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus

Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha^t?" Yes, on whomsoever that curse may fall, we must all acknowledge the justice of it; and in the day of judgment, when it shall be yet more awfully denounced on the enemies of Christ, there will not be a saint or angel in the universe who will not add his *Amen* to it. O let us now muse on his love to us, till the fire of Divine love kindle in our hearts, and we speak with our tongues the high praises of our God!]

3. Seek to abound in love to each other—

[This is the improvement which the Apostle suggests in the words following our text^u." In the love of Christ to us is both the *reason* and the *model*, for our love to each other. Was his love to us unmerited? we also should freely exercise love even to the evil and unthankful. Did his love lead him to forego the glory and felicity of heaven, and to submit to the accursed death of the cross for us? such should be our love to our fellow-creatures: there should be no measure of labour or self-denial which we should not willingly exercise for the good of others; yea, even to the laying down of our life for them^x. Here then we see *the proper duty of this season*: search out the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, that you may administer to them the consolations they stand in need of: and especially exert yourselves to see what you can do for *the souls of men* — — — This is the work that will most assimilate you to Christ, and will best prove the sincerity of your love to him.]

^t 1 Cor. xvi. 22. ^u ver. 11. ^x 1 John iii. 16.

MMCCCCLVI.

CHRIST THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD.

1 John iv. 14. *We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.*

WERE it announced to us, in a time of war, that the enemies of our country were vanquished, that those who had menaced us with utter destruction were all taken captive, and that we might henceforth enjoy an honourable and lasting peace; our first inquiry would be, What ground is there for crediting the report? If we were assured, that several persons, who had been present at the battle and had seen the captive enemies, were sent by the conqueror on purpose to make known to us the glad tidings, we

should be filled with transports of joy, and congratulate one another on the glorious event. Such tidings, and thus authenticated, we have to declare unto you; not indeed in reference to an earthly enemy, but in reference to our great adversary, the devil; whom Christ, our Almighty Deliverer, has subdued. The Apostles were sent by their victorious Lord to proclaim the news: and they have come to us, affirming that they were eye-witnesses of the truths which they have been commissioned to declare. They acknowledge, indeed, that "Satan bruised his heel; but they affirm, that he bruised Satan's head." Satan so far prevailed as to have him crucified: but by his very death our blessed Lord overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; yes, "on the cross itself he triumphed openly over that wicked adversary, and spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell;" and in his ascension "he led captivity itself captive."

But that we may ascertain more correctly the nature and truth of their testimony, we shall shew,

I. What evidence we have of the fact reported in the text—

It would divert us too far from our subject to enter into the question of the credibility of the Apostles; suffice it to say, that, as they had no possible inducement to deceive us, so they have never, on any occasion, betrayed the smallest wish to deceive us. Their veracity is unimpeached, and may fully be relied on.

But, it may be asked, Were they themselves well-informed on the points whereof they affirm? We answer, They *saw* the things which they attest: they did not receive them from the report of others, but were assured of them by ocular demonstration. They saw all which they affirm concerning Christ: they saw,

1. His personal glory—

[Others, even his bitterest enemies, beheld him as *a man* like unto themselves; but some of his Apostles had ocular

proofs of *his Godhead*: they saw him transfigured on Mount Tabor, his face shining brighter than the meridian sun, and his garments all illumined by the radiant effulgence of his Deity; and they heard the Father's voice from heaven attesting him to be his only, his beloved Son^a. This vision was vouchsafed to them for their more perfect satisfaction: and they record the circumstance in proof, that what they reported concerning him they *knew* to be true^b.]

2. His matchless perfections—

[Not they only, but his very enemies, were astonished at his *wisdom*, and constrained to confess, that “never man spake like him.” His *power* and *goodness* were alike manifest in the authority which he exercised over diseases, devils, and the very elements. Hence, on different occasions, his Disciples expressed their full conviction that he was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world: “We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God^c.”]

3. His shameful death—

[His crucifixion was seen by all: but there were some circumstances connected with his death, which tended very strongly to corroborate the opinion which his Disciples had formed of him. The effusion of blood and water from his wounded side in two distinct streams, particularly impressed them with the idea, that he died to cleanse men, not only from the guilt, but also from the power and pollution, of sin^d. And the prodigies preceding and following his dissolution were such, that the Centurion who attended the crucifixion exclaimed, Truly this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God^e.]

4. His triumphant resurrection—

[At the precise moment of his resurrection, none were present except the soldiers who were placed to guard his tomb: but within a few hours he was seen by several of his Disciples: and for the space of forty days he appeared to them on a great variety of occasions^f. By these manifestations of himself, the incredulity of the Apostles was overcome^g: and much stress was laid upon them by the Apostles in confirmation of their word^h.]

5. His glorious ascension—

^a Matt. xvii. 2. Mark ix. 2, 7. ^b John i. 14. 2 Pet. i. 16—18.

^c Matt. xvi. 16. John vi. 69.

^d John xix. 34—37. with 1 John v. 6

^e Matt. xxvii. 54. Mark xv. 39. Luke xxiii. 47.

^f Acts i. 3.

^g John xx. 24—28.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 3—8. Acts x. 40, 41.

[Many were permitted to behold this glorious event: and this, together with the descent of the Holy Spirit whom Christ had promised to send down, convinced the Disciples, beyond a possibility of doubt, that Jesus was the Christ. From this time, (the time of the Spirit's descent,) the Apostles began to preach Christ as the Saviour of the world: and they constantly founded their testimony upon the fact of their having been eye-witnesses of every thing that they declaredⁱ. Indeed, such stress did they lay on this circumstance, that, in choosing a successor to Judas in the apostleship, they took care to have one who was on a par with themselves in this particular^k: and, in speaking of Christ, they dwell on this circumstance with most triumphant satisfaction^l. It was for the purpose of qualifying Saul to bear the same convincing testimony, that the Lord Jesus appeared personally to him in the way to Damascus^m: and, when *his* ministry was undervalued on account of his supposed inferiority in these respects, he triumphantly appealed to his opposers, "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not *seen* Jesus Christ our Lordⁿ?"

If then such a number of faithful witnesses, all concurring in the same testimony, and all qualified to give their testimony from a personal inspection of the things attested, can establish any truth whatever, we must confess that the fact asserted in the text is established beyond the possibility of doubt, and that "God the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world."]

The fact being proved, we proceed to shew,

II. For what end we bear our testimony respecting it—

To set forth Christ as the Saviour of the world was the one labour of all the Apostles. The same also is our blessed employment; and we make that our constant theme, or, at least, the sum and substance of our discourses;

1. That you may have just views of the Father's love—

[We behold the goodness of our God in every thing around us: but not all the creation can exhibit it in so bright a view as the cross of Christ: *there*, even in the face of a crucified Jesus, shines all the glory of our God. Love, in particular, is there portrayed in its most endearing colours. The gift of God's only dear Son to die for man, was the

ⁱ Acts ii. 32, 33, 36.

^m Acts xxvi. 16.

^k Acts i. 21, 22.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ix. 1.

^l 1 John i. 1—3.

most stupendous effort of love that ever was, or can be, exhibited^o — — — It is greater love than was ever shewn even to the angels themselves^p: and, while it brings us nearer to the throne of God than they^q, it will furnish us with everlasting songs in which they can never join^r — — —]

2. That you may renounce all erroneous methods of seeking acceptance with him—

[If this glorious truth had never been revealed, we might well have made the same inquiries as Balak^s. But what room is there for such inquiries now? Do we despise this unspeakable gift of God? or do we conceive that we shall be able to establish a firmer foundation for our hope, than that which is laid in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? — — — O reject not the proffered mercy of your God! Say not, 'The Saviour of the world shall not save *me*.' *This* is what you do, in fact, say, when you go about to "establish any righteousness of your own^t." To guard you against so fatal an error, St. Paul testified with all the energy he could express^u: and *we* also testify, that there is no other foundation to be laid^x, nor any other name to be trusted in^y, but that of Jesus Christ.]

3. That you may embrace the Lord Jesus with your whole hearts—

[View him as sent down from heaven, even from the bosom of the Father: view him as dying in your place and stead^z: view him as saving a ruined world. Can you forbear to love him? Can you refrain from seeking an interest in him? Are you not ready to cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Hosanna in the highest?" Behold him, I say; admire him; adore him; trust in him; "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart;" "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord." Alas! you are but too little affected with his love; and need to be reminded of it continually: "we determine, therefore, with God's help, to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified," and to set before you his love, till it constrains you to love him, and to live to him.]

CONCLUSION—

[Hear once more our testimony. We testify, that Christ is indeed the Son of God, even "Emmanuel, God with us." We testify, that the one errand on which he came, was to save

^o John iii. 16. Rom. v. 8. ver. 9, 10.

^p Heb. ii. 16.

^q Rev. vii. 11.

^r Rev. v. 9, 10.

^s Mic. vi. 6, 7.

^t Rom. x. 3.

^u Gal. v. 2—4.

^x 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^y Acts iv. 12.

^z Isai. liii. 4, 6. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

a ruined world. We testify, that he has done all that was necessary for the salvation of our souls; and that "he is both able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him" — — — O compel us not to complain, as he did, "We testify of that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness^a!" but let us behold you inquiring after him, till ye can say with the Samaritan converts, "we have seen ('heard') him ourselves, and believe that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world^b." It is true, you cannot now see him, as the Apostles did, face to face; but by faith you may "see him that is invisible:" and if only you behold him now by faith, you shall one day see him, as you are seen, and "know him, as you are known."]

^a John iii. 11.

^b John iv. 42.

MMCCCCLVII.

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN.

1 John iv. 16. *We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.*

NEVER was there a truth so deep, so comprehensive, so endearing, conveyed in so short a space as that immediately following our text; "God is love." It is engraven on the face of universal nature: the heavenly bodies, in their various courses, proclaim it: the earth, with all its productions, declares it: the human race, in particular, both in the frame of their bodies and the faculties of their souls, unanimously attest it. Every work of God's providence displays it; and every word of his grace. Even the judgments which he threatens, and those which he executes, must be traced to love as their source; for though, as it respects the individuals that suffer, whether men or devils, he shews only his displeasure; yet, as justice executed on criminals is mercy to the community, so is the punitive justice of the Deity an act of love to the whole intelligent creation.

But glorious as this truth is, it is but little known: the revelation which was designed to illustrate and confirm it, is lightly regarded: and those things

which incessantly engage the admiration of angels, are scarcely considered by men as worthy of the slightest attention.

Some there are however who know how to appreciate this truth. Whilst it is overlooked by the wise of this world, it is known, believed, and loved, by every true Christian, whatever be his condition or attainments in all other respects: if he be low and illiterate, he yet has a just apprehension of it in his mind; and if he be great and learned, he values this above all his other knowledge.

From the words before us we shall be led to shew,

I. The distinctive character of the Christian—

The love referred to in the text, is that which God manifested in the gift of his dear Son to die for us—

[In the context, the Apostle particularly directs our attention to this point^a. He elsewhere declares, that the Father's love to our ruined race was the motive that induced him (if we may so speak) to send his Son into the world^b: and another Apostle refers to that event as the brightest exhibition which God himself could give of his love to man^c. Great as many of his bounties are, this infinitely excels them all — — —]

The true Christian knows and believes this love—

[Others may talk of it with accuracy, according to the statement given of it in the Scriptures; but it is the Christian alone that justly apprehends it. The light of others, like that of the moon, is inoperative, uninfluential: but the Christian's light is like that of the sun: it diffuses a genial warmth through the soul, and causes every grace to flourish and abound. Were it sufficient to say, "I believe," all who repeat the Creed would be believers; and there would be no room for that question of our Lord, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?" But to exercise a living faith is a very distinct thing: this is peculiar to the true Christian: he knows and believes the love which God has exercised towards us: he "believes it" as the foundation of all his hopes — — — he "knows it" as the source of all his joys — — —]

But that we may not deceive ourselves, we proceed to shew,

^a ver. 9, 10.

^b John iii. 16.

^c Rom. v. 8.

II. How we may know whether that character be formed in us—

If a man know and believe that any thing of a very interesting nature, whether good or evil, has befallen him, he cannot fail of being, in some measure at least, suitably affected with it. Now, if we have known and believed the love that God hath to us, we must of necessity have been filled,

1. With wonder and admiration—

[This subject has excited universal wonder through all the hosts of heaven: how then can it fail to astonish us, if we truly know it and believe it? Did the Apostle John express such wonder at our adoption into God's family, as to say, "Behold, what manner of love is this wherewith the Father hath loved us?" Was St. Paul so overwhelmed with astonishment at the idea of the Gentiles being admitted into the Church as to exclaim, "O the depths!" and shall not we be amazed at a miracle of mercy that is infinitely more stupendous, that has a depth and length and breadth and height that surpass the conception of men or angels? What are all other gifts in comparison of the gift of his only dear Son? "Having not spared *him*, but delivered *him* up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Know then, that, if ye have never been lost in wonder at this "unspeakable gift," and at the unsearchable riches of grace and love contained in it; yea, if this be not in a measure your daily experience, you have never yet attained the Christian character: whatever you may have professed, or however you may have lived, you have yet to learn the first great lesson in the school of Christ.]

2. With love and gratitude—

[Men in general speak of the great mystery of redemption as a common thing; and will repeat the Creed, or the truths contained in it, with as much indifference, as if the Gospel were nothing but "a cunningly-devised fable." We might live with them for years, and never once hear them speak with rapture on this glorious theme. But "ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus." "The love of Christ," if truly known and believed, will "have a constraining efficacy, to make us live to him who died for us." The moment we feel it aright, we shall inquire, How can I requite it acceptably? What shall I render to the Lord for all these wonders of love and mercy? Contracted as our views of this mystery may be, "we shall count all things but loss and dung for the excellency

of the knowledge of it." It will be the one subject of our meditations, the one theme of our praise — — —]

3. With a desire to know our own personal interest in it—

[The man that has no fears or jealousies about his interest in the love of God, has no just conception of it at all. He may descant learnedly on the Scriptures, but he knows nothing of the mystery contained in them. To be in suspense and doubt whether we are accepted in the Beloved, is to a true Christian more painful than the severest bodily suffering could be. On the other hand, to be able to say, "Christ hath loved *me* and given himself for *me*;" "My Beloved is mine, and I am his;" *this* is a very heaven upon earth: and when the Christian can adopt this language, and feel "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost," "his soul is indeed satisfied as with marrow and fatness:" he cares for nothing, and desires nothing: created objects lose all their lustre, when once he has thus beheld the Sun of Righteousness shining in his glory.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have not this evidence within them—

[There can be no difficulty in making the foregoing inquiries. But it is a fearful thing to find on examination that we have not the grace of God in us. O think not lightly of the distinction that has been pointed out! for it will form a ground of distinction in the day of judgment, and determine our abode either in heaven or in hell^d. Remember, too, that you will in that day be wholly without excuse. Others may say, 'It was my misfortune rather than my fault that I did not know and believe the love of God in Christ Jesus; for I never had it faithfully declared unto me.' But to *you* there has been no want of *instruction* to enlighten, no want of *evidence* to convince you: so that your ignorance and unbelief involve you in the deepest guilt^e. O continue not in such a state as this! but pray that "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation may be given to you, and that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened^f," that "you perish not for lack of knowledge."]

2. Those who can adopt the language of our text—

[If you can with truth declare that you have known and believed the love of God, then we must say to you, "Blessed

^d 2 Thess. i. 7—10. ^e Hos. iv. 6. 2 Cor. iv. 4. Heb. ii. 3.

^f Eph. i. 16—18.

are ye; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto you;" but "God hath shined into your hearts to give it unto you." Be thankful for this distinguishing mercy: and seek to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." St. Paul, after preaching the Gospel twenty years, "accounted not himself yet awhile to have attained, but still desired to "know Christ in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings." Do ye then press forward, and emulate the angels who are incessantly "desiring to look into these things." Make not the love of God a matter for speculation, but for admiration and praise. It is that which will be the subject of your songs in the eternal world; let it therefore now inflame your souls with gratitude, and animate you to unremitting diligence in the service of your God. Strive to exercise love to him, seeing that he has shewn such love to you.]

MMCCCCLVIII.

GOD IS LOVE.

1 John iv. 16. *God is love.*

THE character of Jehovah is drawn in a great variety of expressions in Holy Writ: He is represented as great and good, and just and merciful, and by every other attribute that is worthy of his Divine Majesty. But, in the words before us, which are twice repeated in this chapter, all his perfections are concentrated in one abstract idea, as if they were all but one, and that one was "love." Now, there is no light in which men so rarely conceive of the Deity as this. In truth, it is more as an object of terror than of love that he is viewed at all, especially by the generality; the desire of their hearts being, for the most part, like that of the Jews of old, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." Let us, however, collect our minds for the contemplation of the subject before us, whilst I endeavour to exhibit God in the character which is here ascribed to him, and to shew you that "he is wholly and altogether love." He is so,

I. In the perfections of his nature—

What shall we say of his *wisdom*?

[It is *love*, concerting measures for the communicating of his own nature and blessedness to creatures that should be formed for this very end. It was for this end that he created myriads of holy angels in heaven. It was for this end that he formed the earth; and placed upon it beings endowed with faculties capable of knowing, loving, serving, and enjoying him. He would have been equally happy and glorious, though no creature had ever existed, to behold his glory, or participate his bliss. As he was eternally self-existent, so he would have been eternally self-sufficient: nor was it possible for any creatures, however numerous or exalted, to add any thing to him. But, from the fulness of love that was in him, he determined to form creatures susceptible of all the blessedness which he had ordained for them: and in the execution of this office his wisdom engaged with great delight.]

And in what light must we view his *power*?

[This also was *love*, putting forth all its energies to accomplish the things which wisdom had devised. No other object had it in view, than the adapting of all things to their proper ends, that nothing might be wanting to any creature in the universe; but that every thing, from the highest archangel to the meanest insect, might, according to its capacity, enjoy a fulness of bliss. The whole inanimate creation, the celestial bodies which move in their orbits, and this terrestrial globe with all its diversified accommodations, are all subservient to this end; and all evince, that the *power* which called them into existence was only a modification of *love*.]

In no other view can we conceive of his *holiness*—

[This also was *love*, making known to his creatures what was his mind and will, and shewing them the precise path in which they must walk, in order to enjoy the happiness which he had ordained for them. On their conformity to him their happiness must, of necessity, depend: and God, in order that no creature might be at a loss to know his will, proclaimed it to them, and enjoined the observance of it as a law; thus constraining them to seek their own happiness, not from self-love only, but as an act of obedience to him.]

Even his *justice*, too, must be regarded in the same light—

[This enforced the law with sanctions; with a promise of eternal life, if it were obeyed; and with a threatening of eternal death, if it were transgressed. And what was this, but *love*, shutting up his creatures to a necessity of preserving the happiness for which they were formed; and rendering it, as might have been supposed, impossible that they should ever decline from it?

If these provisions have failed in producing the blessedness for which they were designed, that, as we shall see presently, makes no difference in the design of God, or in the real character of all the Divine perfections. They all had one object in view, and all were exercised for one end; and all, if justly viewed, were *love*—love in the first conceptions; and love operating for the happiness of all, in whose behalf those conceptions had been formed, and those powers had been called forth into activity.]

We will yet further trace the same blessed character,

II. In the dispensations of his grace—

Hitherto we have seen God as shewing kindness to his creatures in a state of innocence: but now we must contemplate him as acting towards them in their fallen state. And, O! what love will now be opened to our view! View him in,

1. The gift of his only-begotten Son—

[When all the purposes of his grace towards us had been frustrated by man's transgression, what, O! what did *love* suggest for our recovery? "He sent his only-begotten Son into the world, to stand in our place and stead;" and to "die," he "the just, for us the unjust," that he might restore us to God, in a way consistent with all the perfections of the Deity. This wonderful act is, in the former part of this chapter, traced to the very source of which we speak: "In this was manifested *the love of God* towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. *Herein is love*; not that we loved God, but that *he loved us*, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Our blessed Lord also teaches us to regard the love of God as the one source of this unspeakable gift^a: and St. Paul speaks of Jehovah himself referring to it, as the most stupendous display of his love that ever was, or ever could be, exhibited to fallen man: "God *commendeth his love* towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^b."]

2. The gift of his Holy Spirit also—

[In vain would Christ himself have died for us, if the Holy Spirit also had not come down to reveal that Saviour to us, and, by the mighty working of his power, to draw us to him. But shall this be wanting to us? No: the very same *love* which sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to redeem

^a John iii. 16.

^b Rom. v. 8.

our souls, sends the Holy Spirit also, to apply that redemption to us: so that here is a concurrence of all the Three Persons of the Godhead in this labour of love; each occupying a part in this mysterious work; and contributing, according to their respective offices, to effect this great salvation. Say, brethren, whether it be possible ever to comprehend the heights and depths of this love? No, verily, it is altogether incomprehensible, far exceeding the utmost conceptions of any finite capacity.]

3. The gift of his ordinances—

[This, it is true, appears as nothing, in comparison of the gifts before-mentioned. But yet, methinks, it should by no means be overlooked. For the ordinances are indeed the golden pipes by which the golden oil is conveyed to us from the two fore-mentioned olive-trees, in which all fulness is treasured up for us^c. It is by stated ordinances that you are gathered together to hear the word of God, and to receive the communications of his grace: and it is by the appointment of an order of men to minister in holy things, that you derive advantages for the instruction of your souls in divine knowledge. True, indeed, ministers are but earthen vessels: but the treasure which they convey to your souls is that which you would have but little leisure or inclination to search after for yourselves. Say, brethren, have not some of you often come to the house of God merely to observe a form which common decency required, and yet been so favoured as to find there “the pearl of great price,” in comparison of which all earthly things are as dross and dung? And say, whether you have not reason to adore the *love* which has provided for you such means of grace, such advantages for glory?

But on these things it is needless to insist, because they carry their own evidence along with them.]

The same may be seen,

III. In the whole administration of his moral government—

Here, doubtless, through our self-love, we are less apt to see the love of God. But it really exists; and to a humble mind it is as clearly visible, in the execution of his judgments, as in the dispensations of his grace.

Let the nature and end of God's law be first considered—

^c Zech. iv. 11—14.

[We have already said, that his law was a transcript of his mind and will; and that its proper use was, to shew to all the intelligent creation, how God was to be served, and their own happiness secured. We have also already shewn, that the sanctions which were added to this law had the same tendency; namely, to secure the observance of it amongst free agents, who were left at liberty to obey or disobey, as they should feel disposed. And all this, we conceive, will readily be acknowledged to have been the fruit of *love*.]

Now, the law itself being approved, the enforcement of it must partake of the same character—

[As for those who suffer the penalty of transgression, as millions both of angels and men do at this moment in hell; and as millions who are yet unborn will, it is to be feared, to all eternity; we readily grant, that they cannot enter into the subject before us. The men who suffer for transgressing human laws are ready to entertain hard thoughts, both of the laws themselves, and of those who enforce them. But they cannot be considered as competent judges: they are partial; and their self-love blinds them. The community at large, who reap the benefit of the laws, see their excellence; and are thankful that they live under the protection of laws, wisely enacted, justly executed, and impartially enforced. There is not, in any civilized nation upon earth, a considerate man who does not account it a rich blessing to have his life and liberty and property secured against the assaults of rapacious robbers and blood-thirsty murderers. And the very persons who violate the laws, and for their transgressions pay the forfeit of their lives, might have received as much benefit from the laws as others, if they would themselves have yielded subjection to them: so that, whilst suffering the penalties of transgression, they have no reason to complain of the laws; but only of themselves, for having wantonly and wickedly transgressed them. Now thus it is with those who are suffering the vengeance of everlasting fire for their violations of God's law. The enactments themselves were intended for their benefit; and the penal sanctions would have conduced to their comfort, as much as to the comfort of any other person in the universe, if they would have yielded obedience to them. It is their own fault that they have brought out evil from good; and rendered that an occasion of misery, which was intended by God to be a source of bliss. Of *themselves* they may complain; but of the *laws* they must speak with unqualified approbation and gratitude. If a doubt exist on this point, let any man ask himself, how he would like to live in any place where the authority of all laws, human and divine, was set aside, even for the space of three days? Who would not, long before the expiration of

that time, be crying out for the domination and government of equal laws?

I say then, that, as the law of God was made equally for all, and all may receive equal benefit from it, all ought to regard it as the fruit of love; and to honour it in their hearts, as "holy, and just, and good."

It is possible that because, in the present state of the world, far more are lost than saved, some may object that God has loved the few at the expense of the many. But though this is the case at present, there will, at no distant period, be multitudes far more numerous than all that have already existed; and "they will all be righteous," from the least to the greatest of them. If Israel, in the space of about two hundred years, multiplied from seventy-six to two millions, when so many efforts were made to destroy them; how shall they not multiply during the millennium, when the command "Increase and multiply," shall meet with no impediments; and when life will be so prolonged, that a "person dying an hundred years old will appear" to have been cut off under "a judicial curse?" Carry on this annual augmentation, not for ten or twenty years, but for a thousand years; and you will clearly see, that the numbers who have lived previous to that day will bear no proportion to those who shall then come upon the earth; and, consequently, that the number of those who will perish will bear no proportion to that of those who shall be ultimately saved. But, if the objection were true as to the comparative numbers of those who shall be saved, and of those who shall perish, I would still say, that this would not at all invalidate the declaration in my text. The law is equally good, even though every transgressor of it should perish; and the loss of every soul must be ascribed, not to any want of love in God, but to the wicked obstinacy of man, who will not avail himself of the salvation which God has offered him. Before there existed a creature in the universe, God was love: and after he had created both angels and men, he still continued love: and love he will be, when he shall judge the world: and one of the most painful considerations, which will corrode the minds of those in hell, will be, that it is *love* that condemns them, *love* that punishes them, and *love* that consigns them to the fate they have deserved; yea, that *love* to the whole universe demands their ruin. For supposing only that God should from this moment promise impunity to the transgressors of his law, where is there one who would not find a speedy relaxation in his efforts to obey it, and a consequent diminution of his happiness? But sinners cannot be so received. If God could admit to his bosom the violators of his law, the enemies of his Son, and the contemners of his grace, heaven itself would cease to be a place of happiness.

and God himself (I speak it with reverence) would cease to be an object worthy of our esteem. But these things, I say, *cannot* be; and *therefore* cannot be, *because* "God is *love*."]

Let us then LEARN, from this exalted subject,

1. What should be the disposition of our minds towards God—

[Is he *love*; and *that* too in all his diversified perfections, and in all his mysterious dispensations? Surely then we should love him, and see nothing but love in all his ways. No commandment of his should ever be accounted grievous; but we should fly, like the angels themselves, to obey the very first intimation of his will. As for any difficulties or dangers that may lie in our way, they should only be regarded as opportunities afforded us to shew our love to God, and our zeal in his service. When trials of the most afflictive nature arise (for "we are all born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards"), we must bear in remembrance, that they are sent by a God of love, and that they are nothing but blessings in disguise. We must remember, that "whom he loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth: and that, if we be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are we bastards, and not sons: for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" We know that our own children do not exactly appreciate our motives, whilst they are suffering under our displeasure, or when restraints are imposed upon them for their good. We must be content, therefore, to consider the darkest of God's dispensations as fruits of his love; and must feel assured, that, however "clouds and darkness may be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne." In a word, we must ever bear in mind, that God is deserving of all our love; and we must endeavour to love, and serve, and glorify him, with every faculty we possess.]

2. What should be the disposition of our minds towards each other?

[This is the point particularly insisted upon in the former part of this chapter; and, indeed, it is founded upon the very truth before us: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; FOR *God is love*^d." And in another place, the Apostle yet more expressly deduces from it the lesson I am inculcating: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another^e." Let me then call you, brethren, to be "imitators of God as

^d ver. 7, 8.

^e ver. 11.

dear children^f." And in what would ye so much wish to resemble him as this? To have your every act, your every disposition *love*, what could more tend to the perfection of your nature, and the happiness of your souls, than this? In truth, love, if carried to a due extent, would make a heaven upon earth. O! cultivate it, my brethren, from your inmost souls; and, to whatever extent you have carried it, learn to "abound more and more." Yet mistake not the proper offices of love. It is not necessary that love should always be exercised in a way of approbation, or in a way that shall be pleasing to those who are the objects of it. God corrects his children, and is displeased with them when they act amiss: and you also may manifest your displeasure in a way of correction towards those who are under your authority, when the occasion fairly calls for it. But *love* must be your governing principle in all things; and its influence must regulate your whole life. It must shew itself in the suppression of every thing that is selfish, and in the exercise of every thing that is amiable and endearing: you must shew it, by "bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things." O that I knew what to say, that should prove effectual for this blessed end! This I will say, that by this disposition you must be known as God's children: for, if you possess it not, whatever else you may possess, you are in heart no better than murderers: "He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death: whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him^g." On the other hand, "if you dwell in love, God dwelleth in you, and you in him." And, when you have this evidence of a transformation into God's image, then may you "have boldness in reference to the day of judgment." Let it only be said, that "as He is, so are ye in this world;" and we will predict, without fear of disappointment, that, as He is, so shall ye be also in the world to come^h.]

^f Eph. v. 1. the Greek. ^g 1 John iii. 14, 15. ^h ver. 16, 17.

MMCCCCLIX.

THE BELIEVER'S RESEMBLANCE TO GOD IN LOVE.

1 John iv. 16, 17. *He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.*

THAT "God is love," is a truth that can admit of no doubt. The proper improvement to be made of

this truth is also obvious: if he be love, we should love him, trust in him, serve him, submit to him. But there is one improvement of this subject which does not readily occur to the mind: it is this: If God be love, we should be careful to imitate and resemble him. Now this, though less obvious than the other deductions, is the point on which St. John principally dwells: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God: FOR God is love^a." The same line of argument he pursues in the words before us; shewing that our conformity to God, in this great character of love, will be the measure of our nearness to him, and of our confidence before him.

The words before us will lead me to mark,

I. The resemblance which the believer bears to God in love—

The Apostle having said that "God is love," adds, "As he is, so are we in this world." Now, in *his nature* we cannot resemble the Supreme Being; but in *his operations* we may. We must therefore mark,

1. The operations of God's love—

[Love, though a simple idea, may be profitably considered under a threefold distinction: a love of benevolence, a love of beneficence, and a love of complacency. This distinction will lead us to make some discriminations which are of great importance to a full understanding of the subject. We say then of God, that his *benevolence is universal*. There is not a creature in the universe which he did not originally form for happiness; and to which he does not wish happiness, so far as it is capable of enjoying it. The fallen angels are gone beyond the reach of happiness; as are all those also who have brought upon themselves the final sentence of God's righteous indignation. But there is not a sinner whom he is not willing to save; and whom he would not save, provided he repented of his sins, and sought for mercy in God's appointed way. God has sworn to this; saying, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner; but rather that he turn from his wickedness, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of

^a ver. 7, 8.

Israel?" So far is God from desiring the death of a sinner, that "he willeth that all should come to repentance, and live:" and when any will not repent, he takes up a lamentation over them; saying, "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways^b!" Our blessed Lord's weeping over Jerusalem, even after that it was given up to final desolation, gives us a just picture of Jehovah's mind towards the most abandoned of the human race^c.

As God's benevolence is universal, so is his *beneficence unbounded*: "He opens his hand, and fills all things living with plenteousness." Of his common bounties all partake, in rich abundance: "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sends his rain upon the just and upon the unjust." That greatest of all mercies, the gift of his only dear Son, was bestowed on all, as is the gift also of his Holy Spirit: for, as Christ died for all^d, so does the Holy Spirit strive with all^e; there not being a good desire in the heart of any man, which has not been formed there by his all-powerful agency; and formed there in order to the bestowment of still greater good, if those first motions had been duly improved. Nor should all the glory and blessedness of heaven itself be withheld from a human being, if only he would humble himself before God, and seek for mercy, and grace, and strength, in God's appointed way.

In respect of *complacency*, however, God's love is *personal and partial*. It is not possible that a holy God should find delight in unholy creatures: for, he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," without the utmost abhorrence. "He is angry with the wicked every day:" and, though he would still have compassion on them if they would turn unto him, he contemplates with satisfaction the judgments which their impenitence will bring upon them: "I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith^f" — — — It is his faithful and obedient people alone in whom he can take any pleasure. On them he does look with sweet complacency; as the prophet says: "The Lord 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^g:" "As a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so will thy God rejoice over thee^h." In a word, he esteems them as "his peculiar treasure above all the people upon earth," and as composing the brightest jewels of his crown.]

^b Ps. lxxxix. 13.

^c Luke xix. 41, 42.

^d 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^e Gen. vi. 3.

^f Deut. xxxii. 20, 22, 23, 40—42. See also Isai. i. 24.

^g Zeph. iii. 17.

^h Isai. lxii. 5.

2. The resemblance which the believer's love bears to it—

[His *benevolence* also is *universal*, extending to all, whether friends or enemies, whether known or unknown: he has learned to “bless those who curse him, to do good to them that hate him, and to pray for those who despitefully use him and persecute him.” In his *beneficence* too, so far as his circumstances will admit of it, he is *unbounded*. The first object of his attention will, doubtless, be those of his own household, and his more immediate neighbourhood: but he will not rest there; he will take an interest in the welfare of all mankind, so far as to pray for them, and to assist in conveying to them the blessings of salvation. He feels himself a debtor to the whole human race; and he pants to discharge his debt to the very utmost of his power. But in the objects of his *complacency* he is more confined and *partial*. He cannot possibly take those for his friends who are the enemies of God. He comes out from an ungodly world, and is separate from them. And this he does, not from any idea of his own superior goodness, but because he is afraid of being drawn into temptation; and because he is told, on infallible authority, that “the friendship of the world is enmity with God.” He has a different *taste* from the world around him, and lives in a different *element*; so that it would be repugnant to his nature to occupy himself as they are occupied. This is the ground upon which St. Paul interdicts all unnecessary communion with them: “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidelⁱ?” This shews clearly that the household of faith have a claim on his regards, beyond any other people upon earth^k; and that, if his love be of a proper kind, the saints will have a decided preference in his estimation, and the “excellent of the earth will be all his delight^l.”]

Such is the believer, whilst sojourning in this world: he is actuated by love, even as Almighty God is; so far, at least, as he is under the influence of divine grace. But his love varies in its exercise, as the love of Jehovah himself varies according to the circumstances or qualities of the object beloved.]

To encourage this godlike disposition, I proceed to shew,

II. The blessedness of him in whom this resemblance is found—

ⁱ 2 Cor. vi. 14—16.

^k Gal. vi. 10.

^l Ps. xvi. 3.

This is set forth by the Apostle in very exalted terms. But it must first be remembered, that the believer is here supposed to "*dwell* in love:" he does not put it forth only on some particular occasions, but cherishes it habitually in his bosom, and maintains it as the constant habit of his mind. Now, where a person dwells in it, he will be happy ;

1. In his enjoyment of the present—

[There is a mutual in-dwelling between him and God; "he dwelling in God," by faith and love ; and " God dwelling in him," by the abiding influence of his good Spirit.

But these expressions are far too weighty to be passed over with so slight a notice. The believer "*dwells in God!*" We know what ideas we associate with a house in which we dwell: we regard it as our own: we go to it with freedom at all times: in it we expect to find whatever is suited to our daily necessities, and sufficient for our daily wants: we are at ease in it, and feel ourselves secure from the tempests that rage around us. There, after all the troubles and fatigues of life, we lay us down to rest, and find that repose which fits us for the duties of every succeeding day. Now, familiar as this illustration may appear, it is that which the Scriptures employ as peculiarly fitted to convey to our minds the truth which we are considering: " O Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations^m:" and again; " Because thou hast made the Lord, even the Most High, thine habitation, there shall no evil befall theeⁿ." This confidence the believer feels: he looks to God as his God: he has access to him at all times; goes to him without restraint; " enters into the inmost chambers^o of his divine perfections; and shuts the door about him; hiding himself from every storm" which may beat around him; and finding in him that rest, and those supplies of grace, which his necessities require.

At the same time, " God dwells in him," as in his temple. Frequently does God designate his believing people by this gracious appellation; and promise them his presence, as in his temple of old: " What agreement," says he, " hath the temple of God with idols? for *ye are the temple* of the living God: as God hath said, *I will dwell in them*, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people^p." Now this exactly marks the favours which God will vouchsafe to the truly loving soul. You remember that God abode in his temple by a visible symbol of his presence: that there, on the

^m Ps. xc. 1.

^o Isai. xxvi. 20.

ⁿ Ps. xci. 9, 10.

^p 2 Cor. vi. 16.

day of annual expiation, the high-priest entered into his immediate presence, and beheld his glory: thither the prayers of all his people were addressed: there were all their sacrifices accepted: and from thence were all his answers given. Behold, then, under this image, the exalted privilege of the believing soul! God is with him in a way that he is not with any other creature in the universe. To him is the glory of God revealed: his every sacrifice of prayer or praise comes up with acceptance before God; and rich communications of grace and peace descend from God to him. Take these two ideas—the believer dwelling in God, as in his house; and God dwelling in him, as in his temple—and you have a complete view of his felicity, as it is enjoyed from day to day.]

2. In his anticipations of the future—

[Love, exercised in the way before described, is “perfect;” that is, it is of the most perfect kind, and has attained a growth which marks a high measure of excellence: or, as the text expresses it, “Herein is our love *made* perfect, or *manifested* to be perfect^a.” And where such love is, there *is*, and *will be*, a sweet assurance of our acceptance in the day of judgment. The latter verse of my text, as it stands in our translation, is so obscure, as scarcely to admit of explanation: but with a very slight alteration it is extremely clear. It may be read thus: “Herein is our love made perfect: *so that we have* boldness in (*i. e.* in reference to) the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world^r.” And this is a blessed truth. The man who has attained this measure of love, has within himself a most decisive evidence of his own conversion^s. None but God could accomplish within him such a blessed work; as the Apostle says, “Love is of God^t.” Hence, though he well knows his own remaining imperfections, he cannot but regard God as his Father: and he is perfectly assured, that a God of love will never cast away one who pants and labours constantly for a conformity to the Divine image: and hence “he has boldness in reference to the day of judgment;” being fully assured, that the Saviour, in whom he has believed, and by the operation of whose grace he has become what he is, will “confess him before his Father,” and “present him faultless before the presence of his Father’s glory

^a τετελειωται. See 2 Cor. xii. 9. the Greek.

^r ἵνα ἔχωμεν. Doubtless the *usual* sense of ἵνα is that which our translators have adopted. But St. John uses it repeatedly in the sense which I have here assigned to it. See 1 John i. 9; and especially Rev. xiii. 13. where a precisely similar expression occurs, and is translated in this very way.

^s 1 John iii. 14.

^t ver. 7

with exceeding joy." This is the disposition which infallibly "*accompanies salvation*;" as St. Paul has said: "Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and *things that accompany salvation*, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, *to the full assurance of hope unto the end*^u." My dear brethren, be diligent in this work, and this blessedness shall be yours. Only take care, that, in the habit of your minds, and in your daily walk, ye "be in the world as God himself is;" and then you may look forward with comfort to the future judgment, assured that "you shall not be ashamed before him, at his coming."]

In reflecting on this subject, we cannot but SEE,

1. What enemies to themselves they are, who indulge unhallowed tempers!

[I will not say, they are enemies to *God*, whose law they violate; or to *their fellow-creatures*, whose peace they disturb: but I will say, they are enemies to *themselves*; for they actually drive God from them; and cause him, who would dwell in their hearts as their Comforter and their God, to become their enemy: as it is said, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy^x." And what must be their prospects in relation to the eternal world? Can they enjoy any of the true Christian's confidence? or, if they possess any confidence at all, is it not a horrible delusion? Religious professors speak much about their doubts and fears: and truly many of them have abundant reason to doubt and fear; for their tempers bear no resemblance whatever to "the meekness and gentleness of Christ:" yea, many of these professors have less self-government than the ungodly world; and they make all unhappy that are about them. As to their *fears*, they are right enough; but as to their *doubts*, it may well be questioned whether they are right: for if they were Christ's, they would "put on Christ," and "crucify those affections and lusts" which are so abhorrent to his religion^y. They may talk of their *faith*: but if their faith do not work by love, it is no better than the faith of devils. The fruit of the Spirit is, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:" and if these fruits do not characterize our life and conversation, I hesitate not to say, that "our religion is vain:" for St. James says, "If *any* man (high or low, rich or poor, old or young)—if any man among you seem to be religious (and make ever so fair a profession), and bridleth not his

^u Heb. vi. 9, 10. ^x 1 Cor. iii. 17. ^y Gal. iii. 27. and v. 24.

tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, *this man's religion is vain^z.*" I must therefore warn all, but religious professors in particular, that "what they sow, they shall reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he alone who soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting^a."]]

2. What a noble ambition has the true Christian!

[It is no inferior pattern that he is content to follow. He looks to see what God himself is to his creatures; and *that* would *he* be to the utmost extent of his power. "He would be an imitator of God himself^b;" and "as God is, so would he be in this world." Is God love? He would be love also; he would act nothing but love, and breathe nothing but love. O noble ambition! blessed object! sweet end of life! What a heaven would earth be, if all were of this mind and spirit! Come, beloved, and rise to the occasion. See what God is to the world at large: and be ye, according to your power, alike benevolent, alike beneficent — — — See also what God is to his Church in particular: and be ye towards every member of that Church, so far as the individual himself is worthy of it, alike complacent and affectionate^c — — — In a word, let your endeavour be, not only to be godly, but *God-like*; "holy as he is holy;" and "perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

^z Jam. i. 26.

^a Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^b Eph. v. 1. the Greek.

^c If this be a subject for a *Charity Sermon*, this clause, or the preceding, may be amplified, according as the object of the Charity is of a temporal or spiritual nature.

MMCCCCLX.

INFLUENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF LOVE.

1 John iv. 18. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

THE essence of all true religion is love—love to God, working by love to man. Both tables of the law are fulfilled in this: and to bring us to such a state of mind is no less the intent of the Gospel, than of the law itself. St. John, than whom no inspired writer more fully unfolds the glories of the Gospel, abounds, more than any other Apostle, in exhortations to love. The *preceding* context more particularly

insists on love to man: but the words before us, with the *following* context, speak rather of love to *God*. “We love *him*, because *he* first loved us. If a man say, I love *God*, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love *God*, whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from *him*, That he who loveth *God*, love his brother also^a.” Were we to interpret the text as speaking of love to *man*, it would not admit of any satisfactory explanation: but, as referring to *God*, it sets love before us in a very instructive point of view, in that it marks,

I. Its influence, as a principle—

“Fear” is that passion which is chiefly dominant in the breast of fallen man—

[Adam, before his fall, knew nothing of it: but, after his transgression, he fled from the face of God, and hid himself amongst the trees of the garden: and from that time, all the appearances of God or of angels to men have generated fear in the first instance; so that the persons most favoured with such visions, have needed to be encouraged by that reviving expression, “Fear not^b.” Indeed, the whole religion of the heathen world has its foundation in *fear*: love to their deities is never an operative principle in their hearts. Even amongst ourselves, till we are truly converted to God, the Supreme Being is rather an object of fear than of love; insomuch that we love not to hear of him, or to reflect on our future appearance before him. It is on this account that all which relates to God, his perfections, his purposes, yea, and even the mysteries of his grace and the wonders of his love, are, by universal consent, banished from our mutual intercourse and daily conversation: and, however cheerful a society may have been in their communications with each other, the introduction of such topics as death, judgment, heaven, and hell, would cast a damp upon it, and induce a gloom, or a contemptuous smile, on every countenance. The Scripture tells us, that this is the case with all; that “men, through the fear of death, are all their life-time subject to bondage^c,” and that they are “like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt,” utterly destitute of any solid peace or rest^d.

There may, indeed, be in men a thoughtless indifference:

^a ver. 19—21.

^b Luke i. 12, 13, 29, 30.

^c Heb. ii. 15.

^d Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

but this is only whilst they can shake off reflection. No man can think of God and of eternity without many fears and misgivings: and the very efforts which men use to dissipate all serious thought, clearly shew, that they do not *dare* to think, and that God is to them an object of dread, and not of love.]

But “love will cast out fear”—

[The two passions are opposed to each other, and counteract each other, as light and darkness: “*there is no fear in love,*” nor any love in fear: if love arise in the soul, fear will be dispelled, like the clouds of the morning: but if fear prevail again, it will draw over the soul the curtains of night. Fear is excited by a view of God, as formidable in himself, and as hostile to us: but love views him as altogether lovely in himself, and as loving to us; and, consequently, banishes from the soul the sensations which a different view of the Deity had produced. Love regards him as a Father, a Friend, a Saviour, “a Portion,” an “eternal great reward.” What room is there for fear, when such views are realized in the soul? I speak not, indeed, of a *filial* fear; because that is a very essential part of love: but a *slavish* fear, a “*fear that has torment,*” can find no place in a bosom that is filled with love. To a person who truly loves God, the thought of him will be sweet to the soul: and the more intimate he feels his access to God, the more sublime will be his joy. As for death, to such an one it has lost its sting: it is even numbered amongst his richest treasures: “All things, says he, are mine, whether life or death^e.” And so far is he from dreading the approach of the eternal state, that “he looks for, and hastes unto, the coming of the day of Christ^f,” and “longs to be dissolved, that he may be with Christ^g.” I say not, that this feeling is constant, or without any alloy; but that to effect this is the proper influence of love; and that it will be effected in proportion as love abounds in the soul.]

This view of love naturally leads us to consider,

II. Its importance as a test—

It is our privilege to be “made perfect in love”—

[Love, like every other grace, is weak in its beginnings. But it should not be always so: like patience, it should “have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” The command of God is, that we should “love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.” And if we owe to him this measure of love as our Creator, much more do we as our Redeemer. After this, therefore, we should aspire: and, whatever our attainments in it be, we

^e 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^g Phil. i. 21.

should be labouring daily to increase more and more; having more of a Spirit of love; and more of that "Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."]

Of its precise measure we may judge, by the remains of fear abiding in us—

[Examine with what feelings you contemplate God: examine what it is that chiefly operates to keep you from offending him, and what it is that chiefly stimulates you to duty: examine what your views are of death and judgment; whether they be dreaded as objects of fear, or desired as completing and consummating your bliss.

As for that horror to which some persons are subject at the sight of a reptile or an insect, it has nothing to do with the present subject: it is a mere constitutional weakness, to which a child of God may be exposed as well as others. Love will not produce much effect on *that*, except as it will habituate the mind to confide in God, and to commit every thing to him. But in all things that are the proper objects of faith, love has full scope for exercise; and will present them to the mind in so favourable a view, as to cast out all fear in relation to them.

Behold then, I say, the two emotions are like the scales of a balance: where fear preponderates, love will be found but light: but where love abounds, fear will in vain strive for an ascendant. To judge of love by its own direct workings, may not be easy; because the warmth of our feelings towards God may depend, in a measure, on the constitutional temperament of our minds: but by its influence in dissipating and dispelling our fears, we may attain a correct judgment respecting it: if it be "perfect, it will cast out our fears;" but "if we fear, we are not yet made perfect in love."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have neither love nor fear—

[We have before said, that there may be persons of this character, who have so hardened their hearts, and seared their consciences as to have contracted an insensibility to God and eternal things. And I am constrained to acknowledge, that many are found in this state even in a dying hour. But if they be deaf to the voice of conscience here, it will be heard at the instant of their departure hence. Could we but behold the obdurate sinner, or the scoffing infidel, on his first entrance into the presence of his God; does his boldness continue there? No: he cries to "the rocks to fall upon him, and the hills to cover him from the face of the Lamb," whose warnings he disregarded, and whose threatenings he despised. Yes, beloved; though now more fearless than the devils (for they believe and tremble), you will then know what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God."

But is it *fear* that I wish to excite in your minds? Certainly not, except as a preparatory work. I wish your religion to begin with fear: but God forbid that it should end there. No: it must be carried on by love, if ever it shall terminate in joy. Yet, till we are made sensible of our lost condition as sinners, we shall in vain hope to attain the peace and happiness of saints.]

2. To those who are under the influence of both fear and love—

[These opposite feelings are compatible with each other, in the earlier period of our conversion. The day springs not forth at once in the natural world; nor does piety arrive at its meridian height at once in the spiritual world. But, to imagine that the entertaining of doubts and fears is a mark of humility, is quite erroneous: such a doubtful state of mind is rather an indication of ignorance and pride, than of true humility. For, granting that the progress which we have made in the divine life may be very small, still our duty is to lay hold on the divine promises, and to cast ourselves altogether on the Lord Jesus Christ as the appointed Saviour of the world. The smallness of our attainments, or the strength of our corruptions, may well beget humility: but they should never lead us to doubt the sufficiency of Christ to save us. Were we in the lowest state to which a sinner can be reduced, our duty would be to believe in Christ, and to flee to him as to the refuge set before us. It is faith which is the parent of love; and not unbelief: and therefore I say to all, Limit not the mercy of your God; but “against hope, believe in hope.” It is worthy of observation, that the language of doubts and fears is confined to the Old-Testament dispensation. Such bondage becomes not our happier lot: it is dishonourable to God, and injurious to ourselves. Cast it off then; and seek to enjoy the full liberty of the Gospel. “The Son who has made you free, would have you free indeed.”

I would, indeed, guard you against that kind of confidence which is founded on vain delusions. There are some who, from impulses, or visions, or other delusive imaginations, attain a confidence which they will not for a moment suffer to be questioned. But this is not the confidence of *love*. Love is jealous of itself; and is glad to have its actings scrutinized with the utmost exactness. Love affects the honour of God; and is infinitely more anxious that *he* should be glorified, than that its own defects should be concealed. The getting rid of fear is not at all *the object* of love, but *the effect* of it. Let the one endeavour of your souls be to glorify your God; and with the growth of your love shall your peace and joy be multiplied, both in time and in eternity.]

MMCCCCLXI.

GOD'S LOVE THE SOURCE OF OURS.

1 John iv. 19. *We love Him, because He first loved us.*

THERE is, as there ought to be, a great and visible difference between the Lord's people and others. But no one of them has any ground for glorying in himself: for, to every one of them may that question be applied, "Who made thee to differ? and what hast thou which thou hast not received?" Verily, whatever attainments any man may have made, he must say, with the Apostle Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." To this effect St. John speaks in the words before us; in which we are taught to trace the love which the saints bear to their God, not to any superior qualities in their own nature, but to God's free and sovereign grace: "We love Him, because He first loved us."

Now, this being a truth indispensably necessary to be known and felt, I will endeavour to point out—

I. Its doctrinal use—

Our love to God springing from, and being founded on, God's love to us, it is,

1. An indispensable evidence of his love to us—

[Supposing a person to affirm that God loves him as one of his peculiar people, I ask, What evidence have you of that fact? Your mere assertion is not sufficient to satisfy my mind: nor should a mere persuasion of it be sufficient to satisfy your mind. If God has really loved you, wherein has he manifested that love? What has he done for you? Has he revealed himself to you as reconciled in the Son of his love? Has he poured out his Spirit upon you, as "a Spirit of adoption, enabling you to call him Abba, Father?" And has he enabled you to surrender up yourself to him in all holy obedience to his will? In a word, Has he brought you to "love him," and to serve him in truth? If, in "his loving-kindness, he has drawn you" to himself, then you may be satisfied that "he has loved you with an everlasting love^a:" but without this evidence, your persuasion, how confident soever it may be, is a fatal delusion. The Jews of old affirmed that God was their

^a Jer. xxxi. 3.

Father: but our blessed Lord said to them, "If God were your Father, ye would love me." So I say to you, "If God have loved you, you must of necessity have been brought to love him."]

2. A decisive proof of his love to us—

[Suppose now a different character to be manifesting from day to day his love to God, and yet to be doubting and questioning God's love to him; I would ask, Whence did you obtain those dispositions which you manifest? Were they natural to you? or did you form them in your own heart? or did any fellow-creature implant them there? By nature, you are as much a child of wrath as any other person in the universe. So corrupt are you by nature, that "every imagination of the thoughts of your heart is evil, only evil, continually." If there be only a good desire towards him, it has been imparted to you by God himself; who, of his own good pleasure, has wrought in you both to will and to do. If you behold the heavens and the earth, you conclude that they have been formed by an Almighty power: and the same conclusion must you form from every thing which you see in the new creation. If you can say from your heart, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee," you may without hesitation add, "He that hath wrought me to the self-same thing, is God."]

To appreciate this truth aright, we must consider,

II. Its practical importance—

Verily, it is of the utmost importance,

1. For the forming of our judgment—

[It is well known, that confidence in God is our bounden duty: nor is it less clear that we are called to cherish in our bosoms a diffidence respecting ourselves. But professors of religion are very apt to separate these habits, instead of combining them; and to carry both the one and the other to an undue extreme. One indulges confidence, and carries it to presumption: another affects diffidence, and extends it to despondency. But from both these extremes we should flee; maintaining no confidence which is not warranted by God's word; and never carrying our diffidence so far as to invalidate his truth. We must have a scriptural foundation for our hopes: and with God's promises before us, we must moderate our fears. Hope and fear have each its appropriate place in the believer's bosom, and should both be called into action in his experience. They should be like the scales of a balance, rising or falling according to our secret walk before God. If we are really living nigh to God, in the enjoyment of his presence and in the performance of his will, our hope may grow

to assurance, yea, and to “a full assurance.” On the other hand, if we are far from God in secret, and harbouring any lust in our bosom, our fear ought to preponderate, and to be within us a friendly and faithful monitor. Yet, again I say, that whether we “rejoice or tremble,” extremes must be avoided: for we never can have such ground for joy, but that we have reason for trembling; or such ground for trembling, but that we have reason to rejoice. The person most confident of God’s love should search and try his ways, to see whether he be requiting God aright, and walking worthy of his profession: and the person who is most doubtful of God’s love should be careful not to write bitter things against himself, as though he were an outcast from God: for, if his *attainments* may justify a *fear*, his *desires* most assuredly justify a *hope*. And, after all, the doubting Christian has the advantage of his presumptuous brother: for, though he has less of present comfort, he has, through God’s abounding mercy, a greater measure of security.]

2. For the directing of our ways—

[Here it is taken for granted, that every Christian loves his God. In *that*, we cannot err. Whether we have a greater or less persuasion of God’s love to us, our duty is plain in reference to him. His love to mankind at large is clear enough: for “he has so loved us, as to give his own Son to be a propitiation for our sins.” Here then is ground enough for our love to him, and our affiance in him. Let all, then, stand upon this broad basis. I deny not but that personal favours call for love and gratitude: but I say, that the mercies we all enjoy in common with each other, are grounds of love; and I call every one of you to devote yourselves to God with all possible fidelity and affection. Esteem him above all — — — Desire him above all — — — Delight in him above all — — — And, if our Lord put the question to you which he put to Peter, “Lovest thou me?” let your whole life and conversation testify in your behalf, so that you may appeal to him and say, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.”]

MMCCCCLXII.

THE COMMANDMENTS NOT GRIEVOUS.

1 John v. 3. *His commandments are not grievous.*

IT is a painful office which I have to discharge at this time. I must vindicate religion from an aspersion too generally cast upon it; and stand up in justification of Almighty God himself against the accusation

of being a hard Master. The Apostle evidently supposed that there were in his day, and would from time to time arise, persons ready to calumniate their Maker, as having imposed upon them burthens which they were not able to bear, and as having exacted an obedience which it was unreasonable for him to require. Our own observation abundantly confirms and justifies the supposition: so that I need make no apology for proceeding to shew,

I. Whence it is that we are apt to account God's commandments grievous—

That the great mass of mankind does account them grievous, is a fact too notorious to admit of doubt. And whence is it? Is it that they are indeed unreasonably severe? No; it springs,

1. From our inveterate love of sin—

[Man, in his fallen state, is altogether corrupt: his carnal mind is enmity against God, so that it neither is, nor can be, subject to the law of God, so as to render to it any willing obedience.

We are alienated from God himself. As Adam, after he had sinned, fled from God, so, at this time, the language of fallen man to God is, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And, when the faithful servants of God endeavour to bring them to a better mind, they reply, "Prophecy not unto us right things; prophecy unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits: make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us."

To every particular command, not of the law only, but of the Gospel itself, *the heart of man is averse.* Repentance is too painful a work: faith in Christ is too humiliating: an unreserved surrender of the soul to Christ is too strict and rigorous. Man wishes to be a god unto himself. "Who is Lord over us?" is the reply of all, when urged to renounce their evil ways, and to turn unto their God. They will not endure restraint, but "will walk after the imagination of their own evil hearts." Fire and water are not more opposed to each other, than they are to the commands of God; and hence they regard every injunction, whether of the Law or Gospel, as a yoke too grievous to be borne.]

2. From the real difficulty which there is in obeying them—

[To man in Paradise the commands of God were easy, because his whole soul was in unison with them: but to fallen man they are not easy, even after he is renewed by grace. St. Paul justly says, "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Indeed, the metaphors by which the Christian life is set forth in the Holy Scriptures clearly shew, that it is not maintained without great difficulty. A race is not won without great exertion, nor a warfare gained without severe conflicts. Indeed, the terms in which our duty is set forth clearly shew, that obedience, in our present fallen state, is no easy task. We are called to "mortify our members upon earth," and to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts." We are enjoined to "pluck out the right eye, and to cut off the right hand or foot, that may offend us." No wonder therefore that the unregenerate man accounts such commandments grievous: for it must be confessed, that they are altogether against the current of corrupt nature; and that, in order to obey them, we are constrained to urge our way continually against the stream.]

But, whilst I acknowledge the difficulty which even the best of men experience in obeying the commandments, I can by no means admit that they are, or ought to be, considered, "grievous." Indeed, a little reflection will shew us,

II. How far they are from deserving such a character—

1. They are all most reasonable in themselves—

[Can any thing be more reasonable than that we should improve for God the faculties we have received from him; and that we should serve Him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being? Is it unreasonable to require of us that we love the Saviour, who has so loved us as to give himself for us? or that, when "he has bought us with his own precious blood, we should glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his?"

If it be said, that we are required even to lay down our lives for Christ's sake, I answer, True, we are: but has not he laid down his life for our sake? Has he not done this for us, too, when we were enemies? Is it not reasonable, then, that we should be ready to die for him who is our greatest Friend? If he endured all the curses of God's broken law for us, yea, and for our sakes sustained all the wrath of Almighty God, should we think it a hard matter to encounter the wrath of

feeble man, who, at most, "can only kill the body, and after that has no more that he can do?" Were there no recompence beyond the grave, we could not justly complain of this command: but what shall we say, when we reflect on the crowns and kingdoms which every victorious servant of the Lord shall have awarded to him? Does any man account it a hard matter to sustain a momentary pain or trouble, in order to procure a prolongation of his bodily life? How, then, can any thing be considered hard that ensures to us the possession of eternal happiness and glory?]

2. They are all, without exception, conducive to our happiness—

[Truly, if we would designate obedience to God's commandments by its right name, we must call it rather privilege than duty. Was it not Adam's privilege in Paradise to know, and love, and serve his Creator? and is it not a privilege to all the saints and angels in heaven to be incessantly occupied in singing praises to God and to the Lamb? Or if we look at the duties of repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall we not esteem them high privileges? Offer them to the unhappy souls that are shut up in the prison of hell under the wrath of Almighty God, and then tell me, whether they will not be regarded as privileges. But I will venture to ask of persons in this present life; Who amongst you ever spent a day or an hour in humiliation before God, and does not at this moment look back to it as the best season of his life? Who does not regret that such a season has passed away without a due improvement of it? and who would not be glad to have it renewed, protracted, perfected? In truth, holiness in all its branches is the very perfection of our nature, and the restoration of our pristine happiness: and if we were as holy as the glorified saints and angels are, we should be not one atom inferior to them in peacefulness and bliss. Say, then, whether the commandments of our God deserve to be accounted grievous? No, in truth: "they are all holy, and just, and good;" and "*in* keeping of them there is great reward."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who entertain prejudices against religion as a hard service—

[Why will ye not believe our blessed Lord and Saviour, when he says to you, "My yoke is easy, and my burthen is light?" You will say, perhaps, This is contrary to experience; for every one finds how difficult it is to be truly religious. But what is it that makes it so? It is nothing but your own corruption that renders a conformity to God's commandments difficult: and, if once you obtain a new heart, and have

the law of God written on it by his Holy Spirit, I will pledge myself that you will find obedience to be as food to the hungry, health to the sick, and life to the dead. Nor was there ever a human being turned effectually from sin to holiness, but he found religion's "ways to be ways of pleasantness and peace."]

2. Those who profess to serve God according to his Gospel—

[Men will judge of religion, in a great measure, by what they see in you. If they behold you rendering service to God on as contracted a scale as you think will consist with your ultimate safety, they will be confirmed in their notions of religion as a painful yoke, to which no one submits but from necessity. And if they behold you going to the world for happiness, they will feel assured, that, whatever you may affirm to the contrary, religion of itself is not sufficient to make you happy. On the other hand, if they behold you devoting yourselves wholly and unreservedly to the Lord, and walking cheerfully in his holy ways, they will be constrained to acknowledge, that there is something in religion which they have never tasted, and of which they at present can form no just conception. Remember then, I pray you, how many eyes are upon you, and how great may be the influence of your conduct in the world. You may unhappily cast a stumbling-block before men, and involve them in ruin; or you may recommend the ways of God, and be the means of saving many souls alive. Get the love of God in your hearts, and then all will be comparatively easy. You will still, indeed, "find a law in your members warring against the law in your minds:" but, on the whole, you will "delight in the law of God after your inward man;" and be able so to walk, that all who shall behold your light shall be constrained to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."]

MMCCCCLXIII.

OVERCOMING THE WORLD.

1 John v. 4, 5. *Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

CHRISTIANITY is a warfare: every follower of Christ is by profession a soldier. The enemies whom he is engaged to combat are, the world, the flesh, and

the devil. It is of one of these more especially that my text speaks; and that is, the world. Mankind at large are led captive by it. The Christian combats and overcomes it. In this respect he differs from, and surpasses, all the human race. These things are plainly affirmed in the passage before us: which will lead me to shew,

I. The victory which every true Christian gains—

The Christian is here described as “born of God”—

[He is not only born of the flesh, like other men, but has a new nature imparted to him from above, and which he alone possesses. The Spirit of the living God, who moved upon the face of the waters, and reduced the whole chaotic mass of this world to order and beauty, has moved upon his soul, to restore it to the image of his Creator, in which it was originally formed, in righteousness and true holiness. The person here spoken of as born of God, is also characterized as believing that Jesus is the Son of God. This shews what the process of the Holy Spirit is, in transforming the soul. He makes us to feel our guilt before God: he reveals the Lord Jesus Christ to us, as the appointed Saviour of the world: he enables us to believe in him, and to confess him openly before men, as all our salvation and all our desire. Thus the regenerate person shews himself to be a believer in Christ; and the believer in Christ approves himself to be regenerate. And hence the terms, as characterizing the child of God, are convertible, and of the same import.]

He overcomes the world—

[From the moment that he experiences the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, he enters into conflict with the world, and overcomes it. He overcomes both its allurements and its terrors. Every thing in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is fascinating to the corrupt heart of man, and gains an ascendant over all, whilst in their natural and carnal state. But the regenerate person has higher gratifications, which he affects as his supreme good, and for which he sacrifices all that this world can give him. He feels that earthly vanities debase the soul: and he will no longer be led captive by them. He says to them all, “Depart from me, I will keep the commandments of my God” — — —

In like manner, he triumphs over its terrors also. The world will take up arms against those who dare to oppose its maxims and its habits. Sometimes, by contempt and ridicule

it will endeavour to check the Christian's progress; and sometimes by the most envenomed hostility and bitter persecution. But the regenerate person braves all the world's hostility, and will be deterred by nothing from following the path of duty. If the whole creation were to rise up against him, he would say, Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for I cannot but do ~~what~~ my God has enjoined.

There are those who will have regeneration to consist in baptism. But I would ask, Can it be said of every baptized person, that he overcomes the world? Does not the whole state of the Christian world contradict this? Are there any, amongst heathens themselves, more captivated by its allurements or enslaved by its terrors, than millions of baptized persons are? This shews, incontrovertibly, that, whatever blessing God may see fit to confer on any particular persons in baptism, baptism itself is not, and cannot be, regeneration: for, if it were, every baptized person must, of necessity, overcome the world; which we see and know is far from being true in fact.

There is a peculiarity in the expression in my text, which will serve to throw considerable light on this subject. It is said, "*Whatsoever* is born of God^a" overcometh the world. In conversion a new nature is formed within us^b: a new principle, new judgment, new taste, is imparted to us: and the whole of *that* is, in its very nature, opposed to the world, even as light is to darkness: and, as light struggles with darkness till it has overcome it, so does that new and heaven-born principle, which is imparted to us in conversion, conflict with, and overcome, the world; so that the bonds in which, during our unregenerate state, we were held, are broken, and we are enabled to walk at liberty, in the way of God's commandments. This may be well explained by an expression of our blessed Lord, who says, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life^c." The meaning of which passage is, not that the Holy Spirit which he imparts shall infallibly bring us to everlasting life, but that *that will be its constant tendency and operation*. A fountain is always sending forth its waters upwards: and so shall the Holy Spirit within us always operate to raise the soul from earth to heaven. Let the two passages be compared; and they will shew, *not what baptism* does, but *what the new nature*, which the Spirit of God imparts in conversion, will effect, in all that are truly regenerate.]

Let us now point out,

II. The means by which he achieves it—

^a πᾶν τὸ γεγεννημένον.

^b 2 Pet. i. 4.

^c John iv. 14.

The Christian, to his latest hour, is no stronger *in himself* than others. He is, from first to last, like a new-born infant in its mother's arms. But, as we have already seen, he believes in Christ; and, through the faith which is thus formed in his soul, he is enabled to maintain his conflicts even to the end: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

1. From faith he derives his motives—

[He believes all that the Scriptures have spoken respecting the world, and all who belong to it: "It lieth in wickedness^d," and will finally "be condemned^e." He believes, too, that a very principal end for which our blessed Saviour gave himself for us was, "that he might deliver us from this present evil world^f." Under this conviction, he engages on the side of his Lord and Saviour; and determines, through grace, that what HE so desired, shall surely be effected. Hence he draws the sword, and throws away the scabbard. He will "not be conformed to this world: but will seek to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God^g." If at any time he be tempted to taste of its cup, he puts it from his lips, as David did the waters from the well of Bethlehem; saying, 'Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: Is not this the blood of my Lord and Saviour, who not only jeopardized his life, but laid it down for me? I will not drink it^h.' In like manner, if bonds and imprisonments await him for his fidelity, he will say, "I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die, at any time, and in any manner, for my Lord's sakeⁱ." "Constrained by the love of Christ," he "wars a good warfare," and thus "endures unto the end^k."]

2. From faith he receives his strength—

[By faith he is united to the Lord Jesus Christ, as a branch to the vine; and by faith also he receives, out of his fulness, grace, according to his necessities^l. "In Christ he is strong" and invincible^m: and "through Christ he can do all thingsⁿ." To the natural man the Christian's conduct is perfectly inexplicable. He cannot conceive how a poor weak creature like himself should be able so to overcome all the allurements of sense, and all the terrors of an infuriated world.

^d ver. 19.

^g Rom. xii. 2.

^k Matt. x. 22.

ⁿ Phil. iv. 13.

^e 1 Cor. xi. 32.

^h 2 Sam. xxiii. 16, 17.

^l John i. 16. and xv. 5.

^f Gal. i. 4.

ⁱ Acts xxi. 13.

^m 2 Tim. ii. 1.

But the Christian soldier has armour provided for him, even armour of an heavenly temper; and through that he is enabled to sustain the unequal combat^o, and to triumph over all his enemies^p. Thus does he “fight *the good fight of faith*^q,” and thus is he made “more than conqueror, through Him that loved him^r.”]

But in this victory he stands alone; as you will see, whilst I shew,

III. His exclusive claim to this prowess—

God himself appeals to us: “Who but the regenerate ever effects this?”

[Look through the world, and see, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” It must be remembered, that a mere speculative faith in Christ is not that which is here spoken of, but such a faith as leads us altogether to rely on Christ for every thing, and to devote ourselves entirely to his service. And now, I ask, where will you find one single person, except the regenerate believer, who so overcomes the world? You may find some who seclude themselves from it: but they flee from the combat altogether. You may find some who retire from it in disgust: but they are overcome by it. The person for whom I inquire is, a man who lives in the world, and fulfils all his civil, social, and personal duties in it; and yet is enabled to discard all its maxims, to set at nought all its customs, to despise all its vanities, to mortify all its corruptions, and, whilst in it, not to be of it, any more than the Saviour himself was^s? Where will you find one who makes the word of God his sole directory; and determines to adhere to that, in opposition to all the contempt that can be poured upon him, or the persecution which he may be called to endure? Search amongst the despisers of spiritual regeneration, and see if you can find one of this character: search amongst the despisers of a life of faith, and see if you can find one. You may search all the records of the world, and I will defy you to find one. God himself sets you at defiance. Go, search him out: “Who is he that thus overcomes the world?” I tell you there is not one on earth, except “he who is born of God,” and “he who believes in Jesus” as his only hope. There may be found persons who *fly from* the world: but they do not act “as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.” The people who fight and overcome, are those only who have been before described: and it is through faith in Christ alone that they maintain the conflict;

^o Eph. vi. 11.

^p 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^q 1 Tim. vi. 12.

^r Rom. viii. 37.

^s John xvii. 14, 16.

“ it is by the cross of Christ alone that the world is crucified unto them, and they unto the world^t.”]

On the other hand, What truly regenerate man does not effect it ?

[Every one that is born of God does effect it. Whatever be his age or condition in life, it makes no difference; whether he be a king on his throne, or a beggar on the dunghill, this is his spirit, and this his conduct. In the external habits of men there must, of necessity, be a great difference: because it is not possible for a monarch to live precisely in the style and manner of a private man: but, in the internal principles and feelings there will be no difference whatever between the rich man that lives in splendour, and the poor Lazarus that lies at his gate. The hearts of all, whether young or old, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, will rise superior to the world; they will all account themselves “ pilgrims and sojourners here;” and “ have their conversation in heaven^u,” where their treasure is, and where they hope to spend a blissful eternity in the presence of their God.]

BEHOLD then here,

1. A test, whereby to try your state—

[You cannot wish for a better touchstone than this. You see that every Christian in the universe will stand this trial; and that no other person whatever can. To a certain extent, the unregenerate and unbelieving may resemble the regenerate believer: but when you bring them to this test, the difference between them will instantly appear. I would not speak disrespectfully of any person, or any body of men; nor would I presume to sit in judgment upon them. But I will submit a question to you, which I think deserves consideration. It is well known that names of reproach are given to those who are more religious than their neighbours, and names of honour assumed by those who differ from them. At the present day, their respective titles are, *the orthodox*, and *the evangelical*: (what they may be at a future period, we know not: in every age they vary: and my object is, *not* to designate *persons*, but *characters*;) and these are supposed to differ very widely from each other *in principle*: but it is *in practice*, rather than *in principle*, that they differ: for you may hold what *principles* you will; and if you will be *of the world*, you will be reputed *orthodox*: but if you will *not be of the world*, whatever your principles may be, you may be infallibly sure that you will be ranked with *the evangelical*. Here, in fact, is the true point of distinction between the *nominal* and the *real* Christian: the

^t Gal. vi. 14.

^u Heb. xi. 13. and Phil. iii. 20.

nominal Christian is of this world: and the real Christian is not of this world, nor has any desire to be of it: for he knows, that even “to *desire* its friendship, is to *be* an avowed enemy of God^x.”]

2. A rule, whereby to regulate our conduct—

[“We must be dead unto the world,” even as our Lord himself was. And does this appear unreasonable, or impracticable? Let any one imagine a number of angels, sent down from heaven, to occupy different stations in the world for a season: how would they conduct themselves? They would take each his station, whether it were to rule a kingdom, or to sweep the streets. They would look down with contempt upon all the vanities of the world; and would stand at the remotest distance from its contagion. They would be intent only on serving God in their respective places, that they might be approved by him when they should be called to give up their account. Now, what should hinder us from considering ourselves in this precise point of view? True, we have corruptions, which the angels have not: but these corruptions are to be mortified, and not indulged: and though our duty is rendered the more difficult by means of them, it is not a whit altered. Nor need we despair of attaining at least some measure of victory over the world; because the Spirit within us has always this bearing; and because the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we believe, has said, “My grace shall be sufficient for thee.” This, then, I would recommend to every regenerate soul; “Love not the world, nor any thing that is in the world^y :” but let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus, and endeavour in all things to “walk as he walked^z.”]

^x Jam. iv. 4. the Greek. ^y 1 John ii. 15, 16. ^z 1 John ii. 6.

MMCCCCLXIV.

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION BY CHRIST.

1 John v. 6. *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.*

THERE are in the Scriptures, and especially in the history of our blessed Lord, many circumstances recorded, which appear to have been accidental and of no moment, whilst they were in reality ordained of God, and of the utmost importance for the advancement of his glory. For instance, the soldiers

offering him vinegar upon the cross, and dividing some of our Lord's clothing, and casting lots for the remainder; what trifles do these circumstances appear, when compared with all the other events of that day! Yet by means of them were the most improbable prophecies fulfilled, and the strongest possible testimony given to the Messiahship of Jesus. Another circumstance I will mention as deserving of particular notice, namely, that of the soldier, without any order from his superiors, piercing our Lord with his spear after he was dead. This, as far as respected the soldier, was a mere wanton act either of cruelty or contempt; of cruelty, if he doubted whether he was not yet alive; and of contempt, if he believed him to be really dead. But that act of his, whilst it fulfilled a very remarkable prophecy, was productive of consequences which are replete with instruction to the whole world. On his inflicting the wound, there came forth from our Saviour's side both water and blood, not blended together, but in streams visibly distinct from each other. St. John, who was the only Disciple present, took particular notice of this. He saw it with his own eyes: and, in his Gospel, he records it as a most remarkable event, to which he could bear the most assured testimony, and of which he was extremely anxious that every one should be informed: "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side: and forthwith came thereout blood and water. *And he that saw it bare record; and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe^a.*" It is to this that the Apostle alludes in the words of our text; "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood:" and the same anxiety does he manifest to impress it deeply on our minds, when he adds, "The Spirit beareth witness to it; and the Spirit is truth." Let me then, in conformity with his example, call your attention to,

^a John xix. 34, 35.

I. The truth here specified—

In this event there was a deep stupendous mystery, inasmuch as it declared, in a very striking way, the great ends of our Saviour's death. Take the Apostle's assertion,

1. As simply declared—

[Our Lord "Jesus Christ came by water and blood." He came as "a teacher sent from God," to instruct us in the knowledge of his will, to lead us also by his own example, and by the gift of his grace to strengthen us for the attainment of universal holiness. This is called "coming by water:" for, as water is of use to cleanse and purify, so his doctrine was to cleanse and purify our souls from every species of defilement.

But it was not merely as a teacher that Jesus came, but to make an atonement also for sin. This he was to do by offering himself a sacrifice for us upon the cross: and this he did, shedding his own most precious blood, that through it we might be purged from guilt, and be reconciled to our offended God. In this he differed from all who had ever come before him. The different prophets that had been sent from God, came solely for the former purpose: and John the Baptist, who baptized such multitudes in the Wilderness, professed that the whole scope of his ministry was to lead men to repentance. But Jesus had a higher end in view. Repentance, however deep, and reformation, however extensive, would have been of no avail, if an atonement had not been offered to God for the sins of men: and this office neither men nor angels could undertake: he alone was sufficient for it: his Divine nature would give a virtue and efficacy to his blood, which no other blood could have, and would render it a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. For that end therefore he assumed our nature, and died upon the cross; so that, as my text expresses it, "he came by blood."]

2. As solemnly confirmed—

[There is a peculiar emphasis to be observed in the Apostle's mode of repeating his assertion. The circumstance of the blood and water flowing in distinct streams from the wounded side of our Saviour, was intended emblematically to declare the united ends of his death. The Apostle therefore would not suffer it to be overlooked, lest by a partial view of Christ, as a Prophet only, we should lose the blessings which he came to purchase for us. The mode appointed by the law for the purifying of the leper, will place this matter in a just point of view. Two birds were taken: one of them was killed over running water, and his blood was mingled with the water.

The blood and water were then sprinkled seven times upon the leper, and the living bird, being dipped in the blood and water, was let loose into the open field, and the leper was pronounced clean^b. This was intended to shew how man should be cleansed from sin. The Lord Jesus Christ should shed his blood as an atonement for sin: he should also send forth his Spirit upon man: by neither of these separately should he fulfil the office of a Saviour; and by neither of these separately should man be restored to the favour of his God. The union of the two was necessary for all; and the two united should be effectual for all: so that, however deep any one's leprosy may have been, he shall, the very instant he has been so purified, be pronounced clean.

This then all must carefully notice, if they would possess the full benefits of Christ's salvation.]

In addition to his own testimony, the Apostle further confirms his assertion, by adducing,

II. The testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to it—

In two ways the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth," has borne witness to the doctrine inculcated in our text:

1. By established ordinances in the Church of God—

[This doctrine was not unknown to the Church of Israel in the wilderness; for there were ordinances appointed on purpose that it might be known, and be kept in everlasting remembrance. The Paschal Lamb which was slain from year to year reminded them, as indeed all the daily sacrifices did, that they were redeemed by blood. And, in their passage through the Red Sea, they were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, to shew them, that they must also be washed from their pollutions by the Spirit of God; as indeed all the washings and lustrations appointed by the law yet further taught them. Under the Christian dispensation, the same truths are constantly inculcated by the two sacraments appointed for our observance. Our baptismal washing reminds us, that "Christ came by water;" and the sacramental cup, which is "emblematic of his blood which he shed for the remission of our sins," reminds us, that "he came by blood." And our Apostle himself, in the second verse after my text, declares, that *these ordinances were appointed for these very ends* by the Spirit of God, who *by* them, and *with* them, bears

^b Lev. xiv. 4—7.

testimony to the truth asserted in our text: "There are three that bear record on earth; the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and *these three agree in one*:" they agree in attesting that the Lord Jesus "Christ came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood."

How can we be sufficiently thankful for such clear and unquestionable testimonies to these important truths! Here is nothing left to arbitrary interpretations of a few select passages, which an advocate for some favourite doctrine might be supposed to pervert for the purpose of establishing his own sentiments: here are ordinances which speak for themselves, and which cannot be perverted: the spiritual import of them cannot admit a doubt: so that we may consider the truth of our text as fully declared, and incontrovertibly established.]

2. By visible operations on the souls of men—

[The Holy Spirit has yet further attested this truth by his immediate agency on the soul. He came down in a visible shape, in cloven tongues, as of fire, upon the Disciples on the day of Pentecost, in order to qualify them to proclaim these truths in all manner of languages; and, in confirmation of their word, he converted not less than three thousand souls to God in one day, enlightening all their minds, renewing all their souls, and filling them all with the richest consolations. When Peter opened the Gospel to the Gentiles also in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit again bore witness to the truth in the same manner. The manner in which this is noticed by the historian, is worthy of particular observation. St. Peter, in his discourse respecting Christ, said, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Then we are told, "*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*" Here you perceive, it was at the very moment when Peter was proclaiming Jesus *as a Saviour*, not as a teacher, but as a Saviour, who was "come not by water only, but by water and blood," that the Holy Spirit descended visibly upon all to attest that blessed truth. So, in like manner, at the present day, the Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth in every place: he works by it to the conversion of men to God, to the enriching of them with peace and joy, to the transforming of them into the Divine image, and to the bringing of them safely to glory. No other doctrine is ever honoured by him for these ends; but this is invariably, wherever it is proclaimed with that fidelity which becomes a servant of Christ. The people, who receive this doctrine into their hearts, are themselves made living witnesses of its truth, being enabled by it to live as no other persons can live, and to shine as lights in a dark benighted world. In

every age this doctrine has been, and to the end of the world it shall be, “preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven^c.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Be careful to receive these truths into your hearts—

[It cannot be that, when so much care has been taken to reveal them to us, we should be at liberty to neglect them: yet are they most grievously neglected by the great majority of the Christian world. The blood of Christ is actually denied by many as an atonement for sin: and of those who do not systematically deny its virtue, many are yet unmindful of it as a source of salvation to their own souls. And as for the influences of the Holy Spirit, they are derided by the generality as the dreams of a heated imagination. Ah! brethren, let it not be thus with you. Trample not in this ungodly manner upon “the blood of the covenant,” whereby alone you can be purged from guilt: and “do not such despite to the Spirit of God,” by whose all-powerful influence alone you can ever be truly sanctified and saved — — — But rather seek to be yourselves living witnesses of their truth and efficacy. Seek by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon your souls to obtain peace with God and in your own consciences: and seek by the effusion of the Spirit of God upon your souls to be renewed in your inward man, and rendered meet for heaven. So shall you in this world be “epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;” and in the world to come be everlasting trophies of his redeeming love.]

2. Beware that you never attempt to separate what God has joined together—

[Some there are of a self-righteous turn, who look to sanctification only as the means of recommending them to God; whilst others of an Antinomian cast think of little but of justification through the Redeemer’s blood. But both of these are involved in most grievous errors; and, if they obtain not juster views of Gospel truth, will perish for ever: for, on the one hand, there is no fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, but that which was opened on Mount Calvary; nor, on the other hand, can any one that is unsanctified behold the face of God in peace: for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” If any take refuge in the doctrines of predestination and election, let them know, that God has ordained the means as well as the end; and that, if we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,” it is “through sancti-

fication of the Spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ^d." Whichever of these truths any man confide in as of exclusive importance, we would say to him, as our Lord said to the self-deceiving Pharisees, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."]

^d 1 Pet. i. 2.

MMCCCCLXV.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY VINDICATED.

1 John v. 7. *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one^a.*

NEVER was there any record so well attested, so worthy of acceptation, so necessary to be believed, as that which God has given of his Son. Upon the receiving or rejecting of it depends the eternal welfare of all mankind. The riches of wisdom, and love, and mercy that are contained in it, surpass all the comprehension of men or angels. With respect to the truth of it, every species of testimony that could be given to it by friends or enemies, by angels from heaven, by men on earth, yea, even by devils themselves, has been given in the most abundant degree. But it has been confirmed by other testimony still, even by the Three Persons in the adorable Trinity.

From the words before us, we shall be led to shew,

I. Who they are that are here said to "bear record"—

Much has been written, and well written, to disprove the authenticity of this text. Certainly, if the genuineness of this text be admitted, and the sense be given to it which those who adduce it as establishing

^a Any one who should preach on this subject can use his own discretion about the mode of introducing it. If he be perfectly assured that the words are an interpolation, he can state his views of that matter, and adopt the text, in order to shew, that, *though the words themselves are not authentic, the truths contained in them are truly scriptural, and important*: or he can take ver. 9. for his text.

the doctrine of the Trinity, maintain, it will put an end to all controversy on the subject of the Trinity. But we need not be anxious about the validity of this individual passage, as though the doctrine of the Trinity rested upon it; since, if the text were expunged from the Bible, there are a multitude of others which maintain most unequivocally the same important truth.

To establish the mysterious doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, we shall lay down, and substantiate, three positions :

1. There is but one God—

[The unity of God may be deduced even from reason itself: but it is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture^b; nor must a doubt of it ever be suffered to enter into our minds. It is true, that in a subordinate sense there are gods many, and lords many; because angels, and magistrates, and the idols of heathens, are sometimes called by these names on account of the resemblance they bear to God in the authority vested in them, and the respect paid to them: but there is One Supreme Being, who alone is self-existent, and from whom all other beings, whether in heaven or earth, derive their existence. He, and he only, is God^c.]

2. Though there is only one God, yet there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead—

[In reference to this subject, we use the term *persons*, because there is no other so suitable: but we mean not that these persons are *in all respects* as distinct from each other as Peter, James, and John; but only that *in some respects* they are distinguished from each other, though they subsist together in one undivided essence.

It is certain that *there are three persons mentioned in the Scripture*: for baptism is ordered to be administered, not in the name of God merely, but “in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^d.” *These three are represented as distinct from each other*; for the Son has told us, that “he will send the Holy Spirit from the Father^e.” *They are moreover spoken of as performing separate offices in the work of redemption*; the Father elects^f; the Son redeems^g; the Spirit sanctifies^h; and St. Peter, comprising in few words the whole mystery of redemption, ascribes to each of these persons his

^b Compare Deut. vi. 4. with Mark xii. 29. ^c 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6.

^d Matt. xxviii. 19.

^e John xv. 26.

^f Eph. i. 4.

^g Eph. i. 7.

^h Rom. xv. 16.

proper officeⁱ. *They are also declared to be sources of distinct blessings to the Church; the Apostle prays, that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, may be with us all^k."*

3. Each of these persons is God, without any difference or inequality—

[We shall not occupy any time with proving the Godhead of the Father; but, taking that for granted, shall establish the Godhead of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

To each of these belong the same *names* as unto the Father. Is the Father *God*? so is the Word^l, (as Christ is called in the text). He is "Emmanuel, God with us^m," God manifest in the fleshⁿ, the mighty God^o, God over all, blessed for evermore^p. To Him is also given the incommunicable name, *Jehovah*; for we are to call him, "Jehovah our Righteousness^q." To the Holy Spirit also these names belong. Ananias, in lying unto the Holy Ghost, lied unto God^r. And we, in being the temples of the Holy Ghost, are the temples of God^s. The words also which were confessedly spoken by Jehovah to the Prophet Isaiah^t, are quoted by St. Paul as spoken by the Holy Ghost^u.

To each of these the same *attributes* also are ascribed as characterize the Father. Is the Father *eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, almighty*? So is the Son^x — — — and so is the Holy Ghost^y — — —]

What now is the conclusion to be drawn from these premises, but that which is asserted in the text, that "there are THREE that bear record in heaven; and that those Three are ONE^z?"

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 2.

^k 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

^l John i. 1.

^m Matt. i. 23.

ⁿ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^o Isai. ix. 6.

^p Rom. ix. 5.

^q Jer. xxiii. 6.

^r Acts v. 3, 4.

^s 1 Cor. iii. 16.

^t Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^u Acts xxviii. 25.

^x Mic. v. 2. and Heb. xiii. 8. Matt. xviii. 20. and xxviii. 20. John ii. 25. and xxi. 17. John i. 3. and Matt. xxviii. 18.

^y Heb. ix. 14. Ps. cxxxix. 7, 8. 1 Cor. ii. 10. Gen. i. 2. and Job xxvi. 13.

^z Hence we see how properly we are taught to express our belief of this doctrine in the Athanasian Creed: "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance; for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost: but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. . . . So that in all things the Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped."

Having shewn that by the Three Witnesses we are to understand the Triune God, we proceed to shew,

II. What that is concerning which they bear record—

We may well expect that the importance of the matter to which these Divine Witnesses have borne record, is suited to the majesty of the Witnesses themselves. Accordingly we find, that,

Their testimony relates to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus—

[God, who had passed by the angels that fell, has looked in mercy upon fallen man, and has given us eternal life, in and through his Son Jesus Christ^a. He sent his dear Son to die in our stead, and, by his own obedience unto death, to work out a righteousness whereby we might be saved. The merit whereby we are to be justified, and the grace whereby we are to be renewed, he treasured up for us in Christ; and he calls all men to receive these blessings out of his fulness. This way of salvation is open for all, and sufficient for all: but, this rejected, no other remains for us.

This is the sum and substance of the Gospel; and this it is to which the Sacred Three bear record.]

Nor is their testimony at all more than the subject requires—

[If God himself had not revealed such things, *who could ever have imagined them?* who could ever have thought of God becoming incarnate, and, by his own death, expiating the guilt of his own creatures? Who could ever have devised a plan so calculated to exalt the perfections of God; so suited to answer the necessities of man; and so efficacious to renew us after the Divine image? — — — Besides, supposing these things to have been reported, *who would ever have believed them*, if they had not been thus divinely attested? Notwithstanding the testimonies given by the Sacred Three, there is yet reason to adopt that reiterated complaint, “Who hath believed our report^b?” Professions of faith indeed abound amongst us; but a true believer, whose feelings and conduct accord with his professions, is “a sign and a wonder” in Christendom itself^c.]

It remains yet to be declared,

III. In what manner they bear record—

^a ver. 11.

^b Isai. liii. 1. John xii. 38. Rom. x. 16.

^c Isai. viii. 18.

Each of these Divine Persons has borne record at divers times, and in different manners—

[*The Father* thrice bore witness to Christ by an audible voice from heaven; declaring at the same time his acquiescence in him as the Saviour of men; and requiring us at the peril of our souls to “hear” and receive him in that character^d. Moreover, in raising Christ from the dead, he yet more emphatically testified, that he had discharged the debt for which he had been imprisoned in the grave, and was “able to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God through him^e.”

The Lord Jesus Christ continually bore witness to himself. When asked, “If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly;” he answered, “I have told you, and ye believe me not^f.” “Before Pontius Pilate he witnessed the same good confession^g,” though he knew that it would issue in his death. After his resurrection, he called himself “the true and faithful witness,” and testified, “I am he that was dead and am alive again, and have the keys of death and of hell^h.”

The Holy Spirit also bore witness to him, when he descended in a bodily shape, like a dove upon him: and again, when he came down in the likeness of fiery tongues upon the Apostles, and converted three thousand to the faith of Christ. Similar testimonies he still continued to giveⁱ; and at this very day, when any are converted to the faith, it is owing to the testimony which the Holy Spirit bears to Christ; “the Spirit testifies of him,” and thereby produces conviction or consolation in the soul^k.

Thus the Sacred Three bear record in heaven, and by their united testimony encourage our acceptance of the salvation offered us in the Gospel.]

INFER—

1. How unreasonable and dangerous is unbelief!

[If only men, who are credible and competent witnesses, attest a thing, we think it right to believe them. What an insult then is it to the Sacred Three to doubt their testimony! Yet this, alas! is the treatment which their record meets with in the world. Some reject it as “a cunningly-devised fable;” while others, professing a regard to it in general, deny the most important part of it, the necessity of being saved by Christ alone. Even those who in their hearts approve the

^d Matt. iii. 17. and xvii. 5. and John xii. 28.

^e Rom. i. 4. ^f John x. 24, 25. ^g 1 Tim. vi. 13.

^h Rev. i. 18. and iii. 14. ⁱ Acts x. 44, 45.

^k John xv. 26. and xvi. 7—11.

Gospel, are too apt to doubt the freeness and sufficiency of the salvation revealed in it. Let every one consider the extreme sinfulness of such conduct, and abhor the thought of "making God a liar¹".]

2. What obligation lies upon believers to bear an open testimony to the truth!

[It is evident how earnestly God desires that his dear Son should be known, and that the salvation wrought out by him should be embraced. Now believers are his witnesses in the midst of a blind deluded world. Ought they then to be ashamed or afraid to bear their testimony for God? What if the world agree to call the Gospel a delusion, and to consider all as hypocrites or fanatics who embrace it? Should that deter us from making a public profession of his truth? Should we not rather be the bolder in confessing Christ, in proportion as others are bold in denying him?

But let us not confine our profession to creeds and forms: the best and most acceptable way of declaring our affiance in Christ, is by manifesting to the world its efficacy on our hearts and lives. *This* will make them think that there is a reality in the Gospel; and may contribute to win many who never would obey the written word.]

3. How exalted must be the glory which believers will enjoy in heaven!

[It cannot be conceived that the Three Persons of the Godhead would have devised and executed such a wonderful plan of salvation, if the end to be accomplished by it were not exceeding glorious. Surely all that the love of the Father can devise, all that the blood of Christ can purchase, all that the Holy Spirit can impart, is prepared for us in the eternal world, and shall be bestowed on us according to our measure and capacity to receive it. Yes, in heaven we shall see God as he is, and have the brightest discoveries of his glory: and, while we have the richest enjoyment of his presence and love, we ourselves shall be witnesses for him, how far his mercy could reach, what astonishing changes it could effect, and what blessedness it can bestow on the most unworthy of mankind.]

¹ ver. 9, 10.

MMCCCCLXVI.

THE BELIEVER'S INWARD WITNESS.

1 John v. 10. *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.*

THE truth of our holy religion is confirmed by every kind of evidence that the heart of man can desire. Not only was it established by an appeal to prophecy, but by miracles without number. Nay more, as the religion of Moses had at the very time different rites appointed in commemoration of the principal events with which that dispensation was marked; as the feast of the passover, to commemorate the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, and the preservation of Israel,—and the feast of Pentecost, to commemorate the giving of the law,—and the feast of tabernacles, to commemorate their living in tents in the wilderness;—so has Christianity been attested by the Holy “Spirit” given to the Apostles, and “the water” of baptism, which was administered on that very day, and “the blood” of the cross commemorated by the cup which is drank by all in the supper of the Lord.

But, convincing as these testimonies are, the true believer has one peculiar to himself, one abiding in his own bosom, arising from his own experience: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself;” the witness of Christ, and of his salvation; of its *necessity*, its *suitableness*, its *sufficiency*. He has in himself the witness of,

I. Its necessity—

[The generality of persons see no need of such a salvation as the Gospel has provided. Many have no conception that they merit condemnation at the hands of God: or that there can be any occasion for more than a mere exercise of mercy, without any atonement offered to divine justice for their sins, or any righteousness to be imputed to them for their justification before God. But the believer has views of his own exceeding sinfulness, and of his utter incapacity to reconcile himself to God, and of his need of a Saviour to effect salvation

for him. He is conscious, that no repentance of his can ever suffice to expiate his guilt, nor any good works of his prevail for the purchase of heaven: and hence he is in his own apprehension as much lost without a Saviour, as the fallen angels are, for whom no Saviour has been provided.]

II. Its suitableness—

[Looking into his own bosom to explore his wants, and then examining the Holy Scriptures to see what provision God has made for him, he sees that the one corresponds with the other as the wards of a lock with the key that opens it. He has no want in himself for which he does not see in Christ a suitable supply: nor does he behold in Christ any thing which he does not need. Is Christ both *God* and *man*? Such an one does the believer see that he stands in need of; even *man* to take on him what *man* was bound to do and suffer; and *God* to render that work effectual for our salvation. Did the believer need an atonement for his guilt, a righteousness wherein to stand before God? Did he need a divine power to renew his soul? Did he need an Advocate with the Father to intercede for him? Did he need an Head of vital influence to impart unto him all seasonable supplies of grace? This, and ten thousand times more than this, does he find in Christ, whose fulness corresponds with his necessities, as an impression with the seal; in neither of which is there a jot or tittle either superfluous or defective. The every office of Christ, and every character is precisely that which the believer needs; to the hungry, Christ is bread; to the thirsty, a living fountain of water; to the sick, a Physician; yea and life to the dead.]

III. Its sufficiency—

[The believer feels in himself that he is a partaker of those very benefits which Christ came to bestow. He is alive from the dead, and is enabled to live as no unregenerate man can live. Let any one behold a river which a few hours ago was running down with a rapid current to the sea, running back again with equal rapidity to the fountain head; and will he doubt how this is effected? He may not be able to say *what* influence that is by which it is produced, or *how* that operation is effected: but he sees that there is a power which has wrought this: he sees it in its effects, just as he sees the trees agitated by the wind, though he knows not whence that wind comes, or whither it goes. He cannot declare *how* the Spirit which Jesus has imparted to him, operates upon his soul: but he can no more doubt who it is that has thus created him anew, than who it is that formed the universe. He is a perfect wonder to himself; a spark kept alive in the midst of the ocean, a bush ever burning, yet never consumed. He is a living witness for

the Lord Jesus, that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.]

BEHOLD then here,

1. The true nature of the Gospel—

[The Gospel is *a remedy*. The whole world are sick: and in Christ Jesus there is all that every sinner needs^a — — —]

2. The blessedness of those who truly receive it—

[All are in one great hospital: and those who submit not to the physician die: but those who take his prescriptions live. True, they are not cured at once: it is possible too that they may suffer occasional relapses for a little season: but through the care of their heavenly Physician, their recovery is progressive; and when the good work is perfected within them, they are removed to that happy world, of which “no inhabitant will ever have occasion to complain that he is sick.” And what a witness will the believer have within himself at that day! At that day there will be amongst all the millions of the saints but one feeling of perfect health, and but one ascription of praise “to him who loved them, and washed them from their sins, and made them kings and priests unto their God and Father for ever and ever.”]

^a 1 Cor. i. 30.

MMCCCCLXVII.

THE GOSPEL RECORD.

1 John. v. 11, 12. *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

IN matters that are established by human testimony, we necessarily proportion our assent to the number and credibility of the witnesses. And if we will act in the same manner towards the Holy Scriptures, we shall not entertain a doubt, either of their Divine authority in general, or of the way of salvation contained in them. Moses and all the prophets concur with the Apostles in directing our eyes to Christ as the only Saviour of the world: but in the words before us we have the testimony of One whose information cannot be doubted, and whose veracity

cannot be impeached; of One who is too good to deceive, and too wise to be deceived. This witness is no other than Jehovah himself.

Let us then consider,

I. His testimony concerning his Son, and concerning the way of salvation through him—

This record embraces two points; and asserts,

1. That “God hath given to us eternal life”—

[Since the fall of Adam, man has lost all right to life. In him we died, and through him condemnation is come upon us all. Moreover, we have all increased our guilt and condemnation by our own personal transgressions. But God willed not that we should perish, and therefore sent his only dear Son to deliver us: and, having opened a way for our return to him through the blood and righteousness of his Son, he has published the glad tidings, and offered freely to give eternal life to as many as would receive it in his appointed way. He has not tendered it to us as a blessing to be *earned* or *merited*, but as a *free unmerited gift to be received*^a.]

2. That “this life is in his Son”—

[This life, comprehending all the blessings of grace and glory, is in Christ as the *Proprietor*, the *Dispenser*, and the *Guardian* of it^b. He is the *Proprietor* of it. As the light is primarily in the sun, so is all good originally and essentially in Christ. “In him was life,” says St. John; “and the life was the light of men^c.” The same writer says of him again at the conclusion of the chapter from whence the text is taken, “This is the true God, and *eternal life*^d.” He also is the *Dispenser* of it. As life was in him essentially as well as in the Father, so was it committed to him officially, in order that he might impart it to whomsoever he would^e. He himself arrogates to himself this honour^f; and all his Apostles acknowledge themselves indebted to him for all that they possessed^g. He is moreover the *Guardian* of it. When life was entrusted to Adam, he, though perfect, and in Paradise, was soon robbed

^a See Rom. vi. 23. Eph. ii. 8, 9. Tit. ii. 5.

^b For this just and elegant mode of expressing this idea, the Author is indebted to that very judicious author, Mr. Robert Walker, of Edinburgh; whose four volumes of Sermons are well worthy of every man's perusal.

^c John i. 4.

^d ver. 20.

^e Col. i. 19. John v. 21, 26. and xvii. 2.

^f John x. 28.

^g John i. 16.

of it through the devices of Satan. And if it were now committed to us, we in our present fallen state should not be able to preserve it one single hour. God has therefore graciously committed it to his dear Son, that, by being "hid with Christ in God^h," it might be inaccessible to our subtle enemy. By this mysterious, this merciful dispensation, "our souls are bound up, as it were, in the bundle of life with the Lord our Godⁱ." Christ "lives in us^k," and "is our very life^l:" and hence, "because he liveth," and as long as he liveth, "we shall live also^m."]]

Thus has God testified, that eternal life is to be sought as a free gift from him, and to be only *in*, and *through*, and *for the sake of*, the Lord Jesus Christ. But to see the full importance of this record, we must consider,

II. The declaration grounded upon it—

A more solemn declaration is not to be found in all the inspired volume. But let us consider,

1. What *is meant by* "having the Son of God?"

[The more simply this is explained, the more intelligible it will appear. Christ is represented as God's *gift* to manⁿ: and we then receive that gift when we believe in Christ; or, in other words, when we receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he is given. This is the explanation which St. John himself gives us^o: and consequently we may then be said to "*have*" Christ, when we have received him, and are making use of him, as the source and substance of our spiritual life.]]

2. What *depends* on our "having" the Son of God—

[Behold! nothing less than everlasting happiness or misery depends on this point.

He that has felt a desire after eternal life; and has sought it earnestly through Christ; and has received it from God as a free unmerited gift; and is looking to Christ to impart it to him yet "more abundantly^p," and to preserve it in his soul; he who thus "lives by faith in the Son of God," has both *a title* to life, and *the very beginning and earnest* of eternal life in his soul. He can claim eternal life upon the footing of God's word. He can plead the promises of God^q; and may be fully assured that he shall not be disappointed of his hope^r.

^h Col. iii. 3.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxv. 29.

^k Gal. ii. 21.

^l Col. iii. 4.

^m John xiv. 19.

ⁿ John iii. 16. and iv. 10.

^o John i. 12.

^p John x. 10.

^q John vi. 40.

^r Isai. xlv. 17.

Indeed he has eternal life already begun in his soul^s. He was once dead like others; but now he "is passed from death unto life^t." The very act of living by faith in the Son of God proves to a demonstration, that he is alive, and that Christ liveth in him^u. He may not indeed have a comfortable sense and assurance of his happy state; but he really liveth, and shall live for ever.

On the other hand, he that hath not so received and lived upon the Lord Jesus Christ, has no life in his soul: he is yet "dead in trespasses and sins:" and, so far from having any title to life, he is under a sentence of condemnation, and "the wrath of God abideth on him^x." "Not having the Son of God, he hath not life." Whatever he may have, he hath not life. He may have learning, riches, honour, and even morality itself, according to the general acceptation of the term, but he has not life: and if he die in his present state, he must perish for ever: yea, if he were the first monarch upon earth, he would in this respect be on a level with the meanest of his subjects; he would descend from his pinnacle of honour to the lowest abyss of shame and misery.]

INFER—

1. How *plain* is the way of salvation!

[Supposing the way of salvation to be such as has been already stated, how can words express it more clearly than it is expressed in the text? There is no learning requisite to explain it: it is level with the comprehension of the most unlettered man in the universe. Nothing is requisite for the understanding of it but humility of mind, and a willingness to be indebted for every thing to the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. If there be any difficulty, it arises only from the pride of our hearts that would mix something of our own with the finished work of Christ. The fact is, that salvation by faith alone is so plain and simple, that we are offended at it on account of its plainness and simplicity^y. But let the weak rejoice, that what is hid from the wise, is revealed to them^z.]

2. How *suitable* is the way of salvation!

[If salvation had been to be merited and earned by our good works, who amongst us could have entertained a hope? If our works, imperfect as they are, were only to have eked out the merits of Christ, who could tell us the precise quantity and quality of the works that would have sufficed? In what doubt and suspense must we have been held all our days!

^s John vi. 47.

^u See Gal. ii. 21. before cited.

^y 2 Kings v. 10—14.

^t John v. 24.

^x John iii. 18, 36.

^z Matt. xi. 25.

And how would this way of salvation have suited persons in the situation of the dying thief, who are called away without having sufficient time to "make up their tale of bricks?" But a *gift* is suitable to all: a *free* salvation commends itself to all: and the more humbled we are under a sense of our own guilt and weakness, the more suitable will it appear, that we should receive all from Christ, and give all the glory of our salvation to him.]

3. What infatuation is it to substitute any other plan of salvation in the place of that which God has offered us!

[Suppose for one moment (though it is a horrid and blasphemous supposition) that we were wiser than God, and that we knew better than he did what was fit for him to do; still are we also "stronger than he?" and can we oblige him to alter his decrees? Vain hope! We may entertain as strong prejudices as we will, and load the Gospel with opprobrious names; still that will be true and irreversible, "He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." Let all of us then cease to weave a spider's web, and accept with gratitude "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus."]

MMCCCCLXVIII.

USE OF THE SCRIPTURES TO BELIEVERS.

1 John v. 13. *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

THE Scriptures of the New Testament were written doubtless for the whole world. Yet perhaps we may say, that the Gospels were written more immediately for unbelievers, in order to convince them of the Messiahship of Jesus; and that the epistles were written rather for believers, to bring them to a life becoming their high and holy calling. This idea seems to be sanctioned by St. John: for, at the end of his Gospel, he says, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name^a." But, at the end of this epistle, he says,

^a John xx. 31.

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” In truth, he had in his mind all the different classes of believers—children, young men, and fathers: “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one^b.” Of course, there is much in this, as well as in all the epistles, profitable to unconverted men: but I must, on the present occasion, attend rather to believers, and mark of what use this epistle is intended to be to them. It is intended,

I. To assure them, that in Christ they have all that they can need—

All who truly believe “have eternal life:” they have,

1. The substance of it, treasured up for them in Christ—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is the depository in which eternal life is placed: as the Apostle says in the preceding context; “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and *this life is in his Son.*” The Lord Jesus purchased it for us, by his own obedience unto death: and to him it was granted, for our use and benefit; “that he might bestow it on as many as have been given him by the Father^c.” “In Him, through the good pleasure of the Father, it dwells, even all the fulness of it^d.” “Whatever can be conceived to be comprehended in eternal life, to him it is all committed; and out of his fulness it must be received^e.”]

2. A title to it, conferred on them by Christ—

[The Lord Jesus, when he sent forth his Disciples to preach the Gospel to the whole world, commissioned them to declare to all, without exception, “He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.” No one was required to bring any measure of worthiness with him as a title: on the contrary, there was to be but one plea for all mankind; namely, the promise of God to the believing soul. On that all were to rest; and that was to be the one ground of hope to every child

^b 1 John ii. 12—14.

^d Col. i. 19.

^c John xvii. 2.

^e John i. 16.

of man. Life was to be, "not of works, but of grace^f:" and "it was to be by faith, that it might be by grace^g." The only thing required on our part, was to receive thankfully what God offered freely in the Son of his love. In receiving Christ therefore by faith, we have a title to every thing else; according as it is said, "All things are yours; and ye are Christ's."]

3. The actual possession of it, derived to them from Christ—

[Of this, also, the Apostle speaks strongly, in the preceding context: "He that hath the Son, hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life:" that is, life is the exclusive possession of the believing soul. This is no less plainly affirmed by our Lord himself: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my words, and believeth in Him that sent me, *hath everlasting life*, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life^h." Whatever is comprehended in all the glory and felicity of heaven, is now begun in the believer's soul: "He has the witness of it in himselfⁱ;" yea, and "the earnest" and foretaste of it^k. In fact, as an embryo in the womb has all the parts of which manhood is the perfection, so grace is glory begun; and glory is grace consummated.]

But the Scriptures are of yet further use to believers,

II. To confirm and augment their affiance in him—

It is necessary that they should grow in faith, as well as in every other grace^l. The faith of all should daily become,

1. More simple in its exercise—

[The world at large have very little idea how difficult it is to exercise a pure "unfeigned faith." It is easy to *say*, 'I believe:' but to "renounce all confidence in the flesh" is inconceivably difficult. A stone does not more naturally fall to the ground, than we cleave to our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, as grounds of hope, and sources of acceptance before God. To derive all from the Lord Jesus Christ, and depend on Him alone, as an infant on its mother's care, is the very summit of Christian perfection. And where is the person that has attained to it? But, to aid us in this attainment, the Holy Scriptures are of wonderful use: they shew us the fulness that is in Christ, and the emptiness of the creature, that

^f Eph. ii. 8.

ⁱ ver. 10.

^g Rom. iv. 16.

^k Eph. i. 13, 14.

^h John. v. 24.

^l 2 Thess. i. 3,

is only as “ a broken cistern, that can hold no water :” and they set before us all the great and precious promises of our reconciled God, who has engaged to “ work all his works in us,” and to “ perfect that which concerneth us.” After being made to feel, in ten thousand instances, the weakness of human nature, we are made at last to “ have our strength in the Lord alone^m,” and to be willing that “ his strength should be perfected in our weaknessⁿ.”]

2. More firm in its actings—

[Our faith, when tried, is apt to waver. Peter, when the waves began to rise, brought on himself this just rebuke, “ O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” And Sarah too “ laughed” through unbelief, when, at her advanced age, she was taught to expect a progeny, and to become a mother of nations. Yes, and Abraham himself, through the weakness of his faith, repeatedly desired Sarah to deny her relation to him, lest an acknowledgment of it should lead to his ruin. Thus we all find it, when we come into heavy trials. But by seeing in the Scriptures what God has done for his people in every age, and what he has engaged to do for them even to the end of the world, we learn, at last, to trust our God in all possible circumstances, and to be “ strong in faith, giving glory to God^o.”]

3. More uniform in its operations—

[Faith ought not to consist in *acts*, so much as to be one continued *habit* of the mind. The believer should live upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as a branch upon the vine. Whether winds or frosts menace its existence, the branch still cleaves to the stock, and derives from it the sap which is necessary to its preservation: and so must the believer cleave to the Lord Jesus Christ; and say with the Apostle, “ I live; yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh, *I live by the faith of the Son of God*, who hath loved me, and given himself for me^p.” In himself he must “ be dead,” if I may so speak; and “ his life must be hid with Christ in God:” it is by having “ Christ as his life,” that he will insure his future “ appearance with Christ in glory^q.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Study then, my brethren, the blessed word of God—

[“ Search the Scriptures,” says our blessed Lord; “ for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they that

^m Eph. vi. 10.

^p Gal. ii. 20.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^q Col. iii. 3, 4.

^o Rom. iv. 20.

testify of me^r." Yes, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," and of the whole Scriptures^a. It is in them that you will behold his whole character portrayed; and by them will you have his whole work carried on and perfected within you^t. Study them, then, with prayer. Nothing will be gained from them without prayer. From human compositions, you may acquire all that they contain by the mere force of intellectual exertion: but the Scriptures are "a sealed book," till God himself shall open them to your minds. But, if God shine upon his word, and enable you to comprehend the truths contained in it, you will derive from thence such views of Christ, as shall change you into the Divine image, and "fill you with all the fulness of God^u." "As new-born babes, then, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby^x."]

2. Apply to yourselves every thing that is the proper object of faith—

[All the glory of heaven is unfolded in the Scriptures to the believing soul. Make the Scriptures, then, a ladder, whereby to ascend to heaven. Go thither, and there "behold Him that is invisible^y." There get a sight of his covenant: there see your own "name written in the Lamb's book of life." There survey the throne prepared for you, with the crown of glory, and the golden harp already tuned for your touch. Survey it all as yours—your property, your portion, your inheritance. Rise thus upon the wings of faith, and all that is here on earth will vanish from before your eyes, or become like a mere speck in the unbounded regions of space. This is the proper office of faith; and this is the privilege of the believing soul, even to have "your conversation in heaven^z;" and to occupy "your seat there with Christ^a," almost as you will do when you shall be personally dwelling in the realms of bliss. Verily, it is no mean thing to be a Christian. If you believe in Christ, "all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's^b."]

^r John v. 39.

^s Rev. xix. 10.

^t Eph. v. 26. John xvii. 17.

^u Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^x 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^y Heb. xi. 27.

^z Phil. iii. 20.

^a Eph. ii. 6.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

MMCCCCLXIX.

ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

1 John v. 14, 15. *This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

PRAYER is universally acknowledged to be a service proper for sinful men to perform; yet few have any just idea of its efficacy. If a man were to speak of having received an answer to his prayers, he would be considered as an enthusiast, who was deceiving his own soul. Yet it is clear that we are taught to expect answers from Almighty God, and *that* too even in relation to the specific petitions which we have presented before him. The words which we have just read abundantly attest this, and naturally lead me to shew,

I. The confidence which a believer may enjoy in drawing nigh to God—

He may possess a confidence,

1. Respecting the acceptance of his prayers in general—

[God has been pleased to make himself known to us under this very character, “A God that heareth prayer^a.” And in the most explicit terms has he assured us, that “no man shall seek his face in vain^b.” Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for *every one* that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened^c.” In truth, if this hope were not held out to us, it would be in vain to approach our God at all. Thus far, therefore, the world at large will admit the efficacy of prayer: they will acknowledge that *some* good will proceed from it; though their idea is, that the benefit will accrue rather from the meritoriousness of the act of prayer, than from any attention paid to the prayer itself. But we must go further, and assert, that the believer is warranted to enjoy a confidence also,]

2. Respecting specific answers to each particular petition—

^a Ps. lxxv. 2.

^b Isai. xlv. 19.

^c Matt. vii. 7, 8.

[This is plainly declared in the passage before us, and therefore it may certainly be expected. But here it will be proper to mark the different limitations with which the subject must be understood. If these be not carefully noted, I grant that much error may prevail in relation to it; but if these be kept in view, we may take to ourselves all the comfort which this subject is calculated to convey.

First, then, the text itself limits our petitions, and supposes them to be in accordance with the will of God: "If we ask any thing *according to his will*." It were absurd to imagine that we could, by any request of ours, prevail on the Deity to do any thing which was contrary to his will. This limit, therefore, must be admitted of course. Besides, our prayers must be offered *in the name of Jesus Christ*. He is our Mediator; nor is there any access to God for us, except through him. Hence he himself, in order to the acceptance of our prayers, requires that they be offered in his name^d. They must also be offered up *in faith*. A man that doubts and "wavers in his petitions must not expect to receive any thing from the Lord^e." Our Lord therefore declares this to be essential; "Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive^f." And peculiarly strong is his declaration in another place, where he says, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them^g." Our prayers, too, must be presented *with a pure and holy end*; not for the gratification of any unhallowed feeling of our own, but with a view to the honour of our God^h.

Moreover as *proper limits must be assigned to our prayers, so a proper latitude must be conceded to God for his answers to them*. He is not bound in relation to *the time when* he shall answer them, or *the manner in which* he shall answer them. He may suffer us to wait long before he answers us; that so we may feel the deeper need of his mercy, and be better prepared to receive it, and be led more devoutly to praise him when he has answered. In answering us, too, it must be left to him to grant what, in his infinite wisdom, he may judge most conducive to our welfare. "He heard his dear Son always;" yet he did not take the bitter cup out of his hands; but enabled him to drink itⁱ, and for his sake took it out of the hands of a dying world. He did not extract the thorn from the flesh of his servant Paul; but he made use of it, to prevent the risings of pride, which would have been an infinitely sorer plague; and enabled him to rejoice and glory in it, as the means of honouring more abundantly his Lord and Saviour

^d John xiv. 13, 14. and xvi. 23, 26.

^f Matt. xxi. 22.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 39.

^e Jam. i. 5—7.

^g Mark xi. 24.

^h Jam. iv. 3.

Jesus Christ^k. Even to an angel he refused the specific request; but “answered him with good and comfortable words,” which were eventually a more suitable and substantial blessing^l.

Take *these limitations*, then, *with respect to our prayers*, and *these exceptions respecting God’s answers to them*; and then we need not fear to entertain the confidence described in our text: we may not only be “sure that God hears us, but we either have, or shall have, the petitions that we desired of him.”

And now you will readily see,

II. The encouragement which this affords him to abound in that duty—

What is there that man can need at the hands of God? Whatever it may be, he is at liberty to ask it: and may be confident, that, in answer to his petitions, it shall be granted to him. Needest thou, believer,

1. The forgiveness of thy sins?

[Call them to remembrance from thine earliest infancy, and spread them all before him: fear not, either on account of their number or malignity; but go with confidence to thy God, in the name of Jesus; and “he will blot them out as a morning cloud,” and “cast them all behind him, into the very depths of the sea^m.”]

2. A supply of grace, to sanctify thy soul?

[Look not at the inveteracy of thy lusts, as though they were too great to be subdued; but look rather at the extent of God’s gracious promises; and expect that he will enable you to “cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of Godⁿ.” Restrain not prayer before him; and he will transform you into “his perfect image, even from glory to glory,” “by the mighty working of his Spirit, who raised Christ himself from the dead^o” — — —]

3. All the glory and blessedness of heaven?

["Be not straitened in yourselves, my brethren; for ye are not straitened in God." He himself says to you, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it^p:" and therefore spread before him your every want, assured that, as he is able, so also

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^m Isai. xlv. 22. Mic. vii. 19.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 18. Eph. i. 19, 20.

^l Zech. i. 12, 13.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^p Ps. lxxxix. 10.

is he willing, to “give you exceeding abundantly above all that ye can ask, or even think^a” — — —

If it be said, that such confidence is not warranted at this day, I ask, Are our privileges diminished under the Christian dispensation? or, Are we less entitled to expect these blessings, than the Jews were, under their less perfect economy? I grant, that we are not authorized to expect such *visible* interpositions as they enjoyed: but ours shall not be a whit less *real*, or less *certain*. We have not the Urim and Thummim, whereby to consult God, and obtain an answer that shall be legible by acknowledged marks upon the breast-plate; but God will nevertheless hear us when we call upon him; and cause us also, in doubtful circumstances, to hear a voice behind us, saying, “This is the way; walk ye in it.” Though therefore I acknowledge, that, as being under a theocracy, the Jews enjoyed privileges peculiar to themselves, I affirm that, so far as those privileges will conduce to our *spiritual* welfare, we possess them in as high a degree as ever they did; and it is our own fault if we avail not ourselves of them, for the advancement of our souls in peace, in holiness, and in glory. Did the Prophet Elijah shut and open the windows of heaven? it is recorded to shew the efficacy of prayer, for whatever it be made, and by whomsoever it be offered^r.]

I would not however conclude without suggesting *a caution*, in reference to your exercise of this confidence—

[Take care to exercise it with modesty and holy fear. It is possible enough to mistake our own feelings for an answer to prayer; and to persuade ourselves that God is directing us, when we are following only the imaginations of our own hearts. Let us, on all occasions, take the written word for our guide; and, in all doubtful circumstances, wait the issue, before we presume to refer them to God as expressions of his will in answer to our prayers. The truth in our text is to be improved rather for our encouragement to commit our ways to God, than for the purpose of determining positively what God has done, or will do. Let us take it with this limitation, that God will fulfil our requests, if they will really conduce to our welfare and to his glory; and then we cannot err, nor can our confidence ever be misplaced.]

^a Eph. iii. 20.

^r Jam. v. 16—18.

MMCCCCLXX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.

1 John v. 20. *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*

IT is thought by many, that the doctrines of the Gospel are uncertain speculations, and that the experience of them in the soul is nothing more than an enthusiastic conceit. We acknowledge that the mysteries of religion are in many respects beyond the grasp of our reason; and that the inward feelings arising from them can be judged of by those only in whose bosom they are found: yet neither the one nor the other can on this account be considered as uncertain: on the contrary, whenever they are mentioned in the Scriptures, they are spoken of as matters that are plain and unquestionable. In the text, and the two verses that precede it, the Apostle *thrice* repeats the assertion, "*We know:*"—" *We know that he that is born of God sinneth not:*" "*We know that we are of God:*" and then, *in reference both to the Gospel itself, and to his experience of its truth*, he adds a third time, "*We know that the Son of God is come,*" &c.

From these words we shall be led to notice three things which Christians know in relation to their Lord and Saviour:

I. His advent—

The first Christians knew assuredly that the Messiah was come—

[To state all the grounds of their conviction, would be superfluous, and indeed impossible in a single sermon. We shall confine ourselves to those which were most obvious and incontrovertible, namely, *the prophecies that were accomplished in him, and the miracles that were wrought by him.* When they saw that so many, so various, so minute, and (to appearance) so contradictory prophecies all united in him, and were fulfilled by him, they could not doubt but that Jesus was the

person to whom they all referred. When, moreover, they beheld such numerous, such undoubted, such benevolent, and such stupendous miracles wrought by him in confirmation of his word, it was impossible for them to withhold their assent to the justice of his claims, unless they were altogether blinded by Satan and their own lusts.]

But we have, if possible, yet clearer evidence than they—

[Many of the most remarkable prophecies were either not quite accomplished, or but just accomplished, when our Lord died; so that the fulfilment of them might *then* be questioned. But who can doubt whether Daniel's weeks of years^a have not expired many centuries ago? Who can doubt whether "the sceptre which was not to depart from Judah, till Shiloh should come^b," has not departed long since? Who can doubt whether the second "Temple to which the Messiah was to come^c," has not long since been demolished?

But a further and most satisfactory proof of Christ's Messiahship is, that his Gospel was propagated so extensively, in so short a time, by such instruments, in opposition to all the prejudices and passions of mankind; and that, though every effort of men and devils has been exerted to root out Christianity from the earth, none have ever been able to prevail against the Church.

On these grounds then, in addition to the former, *we* may say, "We *know* that the Son of God is come."]

Moreover, we know also,

II. His character—

Many had been the impostors who had laid claim to the title of the Messiah. In opposition to all of these, the Apostle twice designates our Lord as "the true, the *only* true," Messiah; and, in the close of the text, specifies more particularly,

I. His personal character—

[Jesus is "the true God." St. John, more than all the Apostles, seems to have been studious to assert the divinity of Christ. With this he opens his history of Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*^a." The whole Scriptures also concur to establish this important doctrine, that he who was "a Son born, was also the mighty God^e;" that he was Emmanuel,

^a Dan. ix. 24.

^b Gen. xlix. 10.

^c Mal. iii. 1.

^d John i. 1.

^e Isai. ix. 6.

“ God with us^f ;” even “ God manifest in the flesh^g ,” yea, “ God over all blessed for ever^h .” Nothing can be more clear than this fundamental point. Indeed the very name, “ Son of God ,” so far from militating against his equality with the Father, was in the apprehension of the Jews themselves an assertion of that equalityⁱ .]

2. His official character—

[Christ, as God, has life in himself essentially^k : but he is also “ the Author of eternal^l salvation ” to all his followers^l . As there is no other God but he, so is there no other Saviour^m . It was he who *purchased* eternal life for us : none can claim any part of his glory in this respect : “ his life was the ransom paid for us ;” and by his obedience unto death we obtain righteousness and life. Moreover it is he who *imparts* eternal life to us : we receive it from him, who “ is exalted to give it ,” and from “ whose fulness alone it can be received .” As we cannot merit it, so neither can we obtain it, by any efforts of our own : it is purely the gift of God through Christⁿ : and Christ, as “ Head over all things to the Church ,” bestows it on whomsoever he will^o . We know from Christ’s own express assertion (and stronger evidence than that we cannot have), that he is “ the way, the *truth*, and the *life*^p ;” and to all eternity shall we ascribe our salvation “ to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood^q .”]

But it is yet further the privilege of all Christ’s followers to know,

III. Their interest in him—

The knowledge which his people have of him is not a mere speculative acquaintance with his history, but an intimate connexion, or rather, a oneness with him^r . They are “ **IN Christ,**”

1. By a federal relation—

[As Adam was a head and representative to all his descendants, so is Christ to all his spiritual seed^s . They have communion with him in all his transactions upon earth, and in heaven : they are circumcised in him, baptized in him, dead with him, quickened with him, risen with him, seated in heaven with him^t . We cannot indeed be said to have done or suffered *the same things* as Christ, (for to assert that we had fulfilled the

^f Matt. i. 23.

ⁱ John v. 18.

^m Acts iv. 12.

^p John xiv. 6.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^g 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^k John i. 4. and v. 26.

ⁿ Rom. vi. 23.

^q Rev. i. 5, 6.

^t Rom. vi. 4, 8. Col. ii. 12, 13. Eph. ii. 5, 6.

^h Rom. ix. 5.

^l Heb. v. 9.

^o John v. 21. and x. 28.

^r John xvii. 21.

law, or made atonement for sin, would be blasphemy,) yet by virtue of our relation to him as our Head and Representative, every thing which he either did or suffered, is, *as far as respects the beneficial effects of it*, considered as though we had done or suffered it: and on this account we may claim, on the footing of justice as well as of mercy, all that he purchased for us, and merited on our behalf^u."]

2. By a vital union—

[The union of a member with the head^x, or of a branch with the vine^y, justly characterizes our union with Christ. Separate from him, we can do nothing^z: we can perform no one act of the spiritual life, nor bring forth any spiritual fruit. The body and the soul are not more closely united than Christ and his people: he lives in them^a; he is their very life^b; they are one spirit with him^c.

Now this, no less than their federal relation to Christ, is *known* to all true Christians. They do not indeed at all times equally enjoy a sense of it in their minds; but, in proportion as they live nigh to God in the exercise of faith and love, they "have the witness of these things within themselves^d." Temptation or sin may so weaken the assurance, that it shall be scarcely discerned: but when these obstructions are removed, and the believer is walking closely with God, a holy confidence will almost invariably crown his labours, and fill his soul with peace^e.]

We shall conclude this subject with answering two
QUESTIONS :

1. How do Christians obtain this knowledge ?

[The text informs us: It is not from human teaching, or the power of reason, that this light springs up in the soul: it is Christ who "gives us an understanding to know him:" He, who opened the heart of Lydia^f, and the understandings of his own Apostles^g, enlightens the minds of believers at this day, and "reveals unto babes and sucklings the things that are hid from the wise and prudent^h." If then *we* would obtain this knowledge, let us not lean to our own understanding, but pray to him to open our eyes, and to "guide us into all truth" — — —]

2. What benefit do they derive from it ?

^u Rom. iii. 25, 26. 1 John i. 9.

^y John xv. 1.

^b Col. iii. 4.

^e 1 John iii. 21.

^h Matt. xi. 25.

^z John xv. 5.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^f Acts xvi. 14.

^x Col. ii. 19.

^a Gal. ii. 20.

^d 1 John v. 10.

^g Luke xxiv. 45.

[A merely speculative knowledge of Christianity expands the mind, and leads it to high and heavenly contemplations. But no tongue can utter the benefits arising from an experimental acquaintance with Christ: What just views does it give us of every thing in the world! What peace does it bring into the conscience! How does it disarm death of its sting! And what bright prospects does it open to us in the eternal world! O let a desire after the full blessings of salvation animate us in our inquiries after truth! Let us seek to have more enlarged views of Christ, and of our interest in him; and thus shall we be prepared for that complete vision of his glory, in comparison of which our present knowledge is but as a taper before the sun.]

3 JOHN.

MMCCCCLXXI.

A MINISTER'S CHIEF JOY.

3 John, 4. *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

THERE subsists between a minister and his people a relation which may not unfitly be compared with that of a father and his children. The metaphorical expression of a father is more strictly applicable to those whom a minister "has begotten through the Gospel^a:" but it needs not to be restricted to this sense: it may be used with greater latitude in reference to those over whom a minister watches, and for whose benefit he labours, with parental anxiety, especially where the person to whom the paternal relation is ascribed is somewhat advanced in years. It should seem that Gaius, to whom St. John wrote this epistle, was converted to the faith by the ministry of Paul^b: yet St. John properly includes him amongst his children, because he felt the same regard for him as for those who were the more immediate seals of his own ministry; the whole body of his people being in his different epistles frequently designated by that favourite appellation^c.

Respecting the state of Gaius' soul, the Apostle had heard the most satisfactory account; so that he

^a 1 Cor. iv. 15. ^b 1 Cor. i. 14. ^c 1 John ii. 1. and iii. 18.

could not shew his anxiety for the bodily health of Gaius more strongly, than by wishing it to prosper *in every respect*^d, “even as his soul prospered.” Having declared the joy which this information had afforded him, he states, in general, that he had no greater joy than what arose from such tidings as these.

From hence we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is the great object of a minister’s desire in behalf of his people—

To bring men to the acknowledgment of the truth is the first labour of a minister: and, till that has been effected, no other relation exists between him and them than that which he has by nature, or that which he has in common with all mankind. But when they have embraced the truth, and are become members of the family of Christ, then the minister seeks their advancement in the divine life—

[Christianity, as experienced in the soul, is not a sentiment, but a habit: it not merely informs the mind, but regulates the life: and, whilst it introduces “men from darkness unto light, it turns them also from the power of Satan unto God.” Having brought souls to an enjoyment of Christ, and to a conformity to his mind and will, the minister desires to see them walk in the truth,]

1. Consistently—

[He longs to behold in them a holy consistency; a high state of heavenly affections, and a careful attention to the duties of morality. Morality however will not satisfy him if detached from fellowship with God: nor will the most sublime intercourse with God in prayer and praise approve itself to him, if it be not accompanied with a conscientious discharge of every personal and relative duty — — —]

2. Steadily—

[In them he expects to find a steadiness that bids defiance to temptation, and cannot be diverted from its purpose, either by the allurements of sense or the terrors of persecution: he would have his converts to be “steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord^e.” A fixedness of mind he regards as absolutely essential to the Christian character; and he is never satisfied with the state of his people unless he

^d *περὶ πάντων*, ver. 2.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 58.

find that, in the midst of the severest persecutions, they are enabled to say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy" — — —]

3. Progressively—

[This is implied in the term "walking," which is a progressive motion necessary to the Christian life. There is no possibility of standing still in religion. Our motion, if not progressive, must be retrograde. Now, as a parent wishes to see in his children a gradual advancement towards maturity both in their bodily and intellectual faculties, so does a minister long for his people's progress towards perfection. He hopes to see in them a more entire devotedness of heart unto their God and Saviour; evincing itself in a greater spirituality of mind, an increasing indifference to the things of time and sense, and a more laborious engagement in every good work — — — In a word, he wishes to see their progress like that of the sun in the firmament, "their path shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day^f."]]

The emotions with which St. John beheld this conduct in Gaius were most sublime: and such they will be in every faithful minister; as will appear, whilst we shew,

II. Whence it is that the attainment of that object fills him with such exalted joy—

St. John was not inferior to any one of the Apostles in holy joy. He had been pre-eminently favoured by his Lord and Saviour, insomuch that he was known by the name of "the Disciple whom Jesus loved." He had beheld his Lord transfigured on Mount Tabor, and shining forth in all the glory of the Godhead. He had lain in the bosom of his Lord, as on many other occasions, so especially on that evening, when the commemorative ordinance of the Lord's supper was instituted: yet even "he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in truth." Much more therefore may we expect that ministers, less favoured than he, should have no joy more exalted than that which the sight or hearing of their people's prosperity affords them. This is their sublimest source of happiness;

^f Prov. iv. 18.

1. Because it is by this only that the ends of their ministry are answered—

[If the minister impart to his children “the sincere milk of the word,” it is, “that they may grow thereby:” or, if he set before them “the stronger meat” of the Gospel, it is, that those who are able to receive it may be the more nourished and strengthened for their future labours. If he see no growth in them, “he stands in doubt” whether they have ever been truly and savingly converted to the faith of Christ; and “he travails, as it were, a second time in birth with them, until Christ be fully and visibly formed in them^g.” But when he beholds the plants, which he is daily watering, thriving, and diffusing all around the fragrancy of holy and devout affections, he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied: and what the angels enjoyed at the first symptoms of their conversion, he enjoys from day to day: his very life is bound up in their welfare; and “he then lives, when they stand fast in the Lord^h.”]

2. Because by this only can God be glorified—

[Nothing brings more dishonour to God than an inconsistent conduct in those who profess godliness. The very name of God is often blasphemed through the misconduct of those who call themselves his peculiar people. The ungodly world are not content with condemning the offending individual; “they speak evil of the way of truth” itself, as though that countenanced and even produced the evils that have been committed. On the other hand, “the person who brings forth much fruit glorifies God,” and “by his well-doing puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” To a minister who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and is jealous for the honour of his name, nothing can be more delightful than to see truth triumphing over error, and the kingdom of Christ exalted on the ruins of Satan’s empire. On every fresh report that is brought to his ears, he will exclaim, “Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!” — — —]

3. Because without this they can have no hope of ever meeting their people in the realms of bliss—

[How joyful is the thought of that hour, when the minister shall go with his people into the presence of his God, saying, “Here am I, and the children thou hast given me!” And how glorious will be the recompence of his labours, when he shall “have them as his joy and crown of rejoicing” to all eternityⁱ! If an earthly parent hear of his children, that they are advancing visibly in every thing that is good, so that,

^g Gal. iv. 19, 20.

^h 1 Thess. iii. 8.

ⁱ 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20,

though he have no hope of seeing them in this world, he feels assured that he shall meet them again at the right hand of God, and dwell with them for ever in his immediate presence; the thought of a temporary separation from them is swallowed up in the joy that the blessed prospect affords him. So it is with the spiritual Parent, when beholding or hearing of the prosperity of his children: for he knows that he shall "rejoice in the day of Christ, that he has not run in vain, or laboured in vain^k."]]

Permit me now to ADDRESS you,

1. In a way of retrospective inquiry—

[What report must I hear of you? What report have you to give me of yourselves? Has your walk been consistent, uniform, progressive? — — — Be assured, I am prepared to rejoice in your welfare with a truly paternal joy — — —]

2. In a way of prospective admonition—

[Great and manifold are your dangers, whatever progress you may have made. That you may escape them, "take heed to God's word," and follow the steps of your blessed Lord: and look to him for all needful strength. "Be strong in him," and you shall "be more than conquerors through him" — — —]

^k Phil. ii. 16.

J U D E.

MMCCCCLXXII.

CHRIST'S COMING TO JUDGMENT.

Jude 14, 15. *Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

GOD has had in every age some to testify against the ungodly, and to warn them of the consequences of their sin at the future judgment: and though the faithful execution of this office meets with but ill returns from an ungrateful world, yet we trust there will be found, to the end of time, some, who will gladly suffer reproach or even death itself in the service of their God, and in the benevolent attempt to save their fellow-sinners from destruction. We do not indeed hear of many, who were witnesses for God, before the time of Moses; and even his warnings and exhortations were enforced principally with *temporal* sanctions: yet the certainty of a future judgment was known not only by Moses, but by the antediluvian world; and was solemnly urged by Enoch as a motive to repentance. This prophecy is not recorded in the Old Testament; but, by whatever means St. Jude attained the knowledge of it, whether by tradition, or by some written memorial,

or by immediate inspiration, we may be sure that it was delivered by Enoch; and we may be thankful that such a precious fragment of inspired truth has been preserved to us.

It proclaims to us,

I. The manner in which our Lord shall come to judgment—

Christ, we are assured, is coming to judge the world—

[There can be no reason to doubt that Enoch referred to Christ, even to that very "seed of the woman, who was to bruise the serpent's head:" him he represents as coming to complete his victory over Satan and his agents by calling them to his tribunal, and by consigning them over to the punishment they have deserved. The New Testament writers uniformly speak to the same effect: they declare that it is at the judgment seat of CHRIST we must stand^a; that it is Christ who is ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead^b; and, that all judgment is *therefore* committed unto him, *because* he is the Son of man^c; or, in other words, that he, who died for sinners, shall, in that very nature that he assumed for them, be the immediate author of salvation to his followers and of condemnation to his enemies.]

And even the manner of his appearing is here plainly predicted—

[It is not with "his *saints*," but with his *holy ones*, or holy angels, that he will come. The saints will not be his assessors in judgment till they themselves shall have received their sentence: *then* indeed "they shall judge angels^d;" but till then, they themselves will stand before him to be judged. But the holy angels will be his attendants in the clouds of heaven; all the "myriads" of them shall descend with him from their blessed abodes, to increase the solemnity of that day, and to honour him, to whom they owe their very existence. This accords with the description given by Daniel^e, by St. Paul^f, and by Christ himself^g. How different will our Lord's appearance then be from what it was when he first visited our guilty world, and lay a helpless infant in the manger! and how earnestly should we now exert ourselves that we may be prepared to meet him!]

^a 2 Cor. v. 10.

^b Acts x. 42.

^c John v. 27.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 3.

^e Dan. vii. 9, 10.

^f 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^g Matt. xxv. 31.

That our minds may be raised to an expectation of that day, let us consider,

II. The ends of his coming—

It is not to display his own glory that Christ will come; but,

1. To pass judgment upon the whole world—

[All, who have ever lived in this wretched world, shall be summoned before him. The old and the young, the rich and the poor, will all come forth out of their graves^h, and those that shall be then living upon earth shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and all shall stand together at his tribunalⁱ. Every one shall then be tried as by fire^k; their actions shall then be weighed as in a balance; and the most secret motions of their hearts be brought to light^l. Then shall they that are approved, “have praise of God;” and they that are disapproved, be driven from his presence. Nor will Jesus merely pronounce the sentence of condemnation or acquittal, but he will “*execute*” it himself, either exalting them instantly to thrones of glory, or casting them headlong into “the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.”]

2. To manifest the equity of his decisions—

[Whatever endeavours be now used to shew men their guilt and danger, they have many things to allege in their own favour^m; nor even “if we could speak with the tongues of angels,” could we bring home conviction to their hearts. But Jesus will shew them, beyond all contradiction, the futility of their excuses: and will prove by such unquestionable evidence “the deeds they have committed, the words they have spoken,” and the thoughts they have entertained, that they shall be silenced and confounded before him. The ministers, who once laboured for their salvation, shall then be forced to bear testimony against them: their companions in sin, though to their own confusion, must also testify of those deeds of darkness, which they once fondly hoped would be buried in eternal oblivion. The very places, where their most secret iniquities were committed, should rather stand forth to accuse them, than that they should escape with impunityⁿ. Above all, “God himself will be a swift witness against them^o,” and will so thoroughly “convince” them of all their sins, whether of

^h Rev. xx. 12, 13.

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 13.

^l Rom. ii. 16.

^m They will impute their negligence to their situation in life, to necessity, or to any thing rather than the true cause, their own utter aversion to God and holiness.

ⁿ Hab. ii. 11.

^o Mal. iii. 5.

commission or of omission, that they shall be constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence, which dooms them to everlasting burnings. Even in hell will they be compelled to say, "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments^p."]]

INFER—

1. How needful is it that we should instantly begin our preparation for that day!

[Five thousand years ago the prophet spake of Jesus as so near at hand, that it seemed as if he were already come^a; and it is in this way that all, whether Prophets or Apostles, have been inspired to speak. So strongly did St. Paul express himself on this subject that the Thessalonians conceived the judgment-day to be almost immediately at hand^r. In the same manner must we say, "The Lord is at hand;" "the Judge is at the door^s." He surely is coming as soon as ever the events that are ordained to precede his advent shall have received their accomplishment. And with respect to us, it signifies little whether it be near or distant, since as death leaves us, judgment will find us. Is it not even madness then to delay our repentance, since we cannot tell but that death may come within the next year, or day, or hour? Beloved, shall your Lord come, and find you sleeping? Is he hastening towards you, and will you not prepare to meet him? O awake from your slumbers, and turn to him with your whole hearts; that so you may "have confidence before him at his coming."]

2. How desirable is it to possess an interest in Christ!

[It surely is not necessary to prove that we are ungodly, since we have all sinned, times without number, in thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty. Whither then shall we go for the remission of our sins? How shall we get our iniquities blotted out from the book of his remembrance? Our tears, even if we could shed rivers of tears, will never avail for this end: nothing but the blood of Jesus can ever cleanse us from the guilt of one sin: and, if we be not washed in that fountain, we shall die in our iniquities, and lie under the guilt of them for ever. Let us then seek an interest in Christ. Let us never attempt to substitute any repentance or reformation of our own, in the place of his meritorious blood and righteousness: but let it be our one desire to "be found in him," and to obtain from him those garments of salvation, which alone can "cover the nakedness" of our guilty souls^t.]

^p Rev. xvi. 7.

^a ἤλαθε.

^r 2 Thess. ii. 2.

^s Phil. iv. 5. Jam. v. 9.

^t Rev. iii. 18.

3. With what confidence and comfort may believers look forward to the coming of their Lord!

[Whom will they have for their judge but the very person who bought them with his blood? the very person in whom they have believed; and to whom they cleaved with full purpose of heart? Be it so then; the catalogue of their sins shall be produced, a catalogue reaching, as it were, from heaven to earth; and they shall not have one word to offer in arrest of judgment: yet, will the Saviour pass a sentence of condemnation upon them? Will he not himself stand forth and testify, "I saw their deep contrition; I treasured up their tears in my vial; I was witness to their frequent sighs and groans, and to their cries for mercy through my atoning blood:" "Deliver them from going down into the pit; I paid their ransom:" they were mine; and they manifested that they were mine^u, by their obedience to my will, and their conformity to my image: "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit my kingdom prepared for you?" Fear not then, ye weak and trembling saints; but rather "be looking for and hasting to the coming of the day of Christ^x:" ye shall surely stand before him with joy; while they, who once justified their ungodliness, and thought, that to be among *the godly* was a fit matter for derision, shall bewail their folly, and confess the equity of the sentence that fixes *you* in heaven, and *themselves* in hell. Remember then with gratitude that you are to have Jesus for your judge; and when he says, "Behold, I come quickly," let your hearts reply, "Even so, come Lord Jesus^y."]]

^u God represents himself in this very light. Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

^x 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^y Rev. xxii. 20.

MMCCCCLXXIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTIES.

Jude 20, 21. *But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

IN every age there has prevailed in the Church a proneness to depart both from the principles and practice of the Gospel. St. Jude in his day, writing to the whole Christian Church respecting "their common salvation," says, "it was needful for him to write to them, and to exhort them all to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

At the same time he declares, that “ungodly men had crept in amongst the saints,” and had not only grievously dishonoured the Gospel, but had “turned the very grace of God itself into lasciviousness,” and vindicated their licentious practices as allowed and sanctioned by the Gospel of Christ^a. Against the influence of such pernicious examples, the Apostle was anxious to preserve all who yet maintained their integrity. He bade them remember, that the Apostles of our Lord had from the beginning taught them to expect, that such hypocrites and apostates would arise^b: and he exhorted them so to walk before God, that they might hold fast their steadfastness even to the end. The directions which he gave them were such as could not but approve themselves to their judgment, and commend themselves to their inmost souls. The same dangers to the Church are existing still; and the same directions therefore are necessary for us, as well as for those in the apostolic age. Permit me then to call your attention to them:

I. To the two former, as *instrumental to your welfare*—

“Build up yourselves, brethren, on your most holy faith”—

[It is here supposed that you have embraced the faith, and that you are standing upon the true foundation which God himself has laid in Zion. But you must not be satisfied with having believed in Christ: for St. Paul says, “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and *built up in him*, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving^c.” Your faith is verily a “most holy faith:” in its nature, in its tendency, and in all its practical effects, it is “most holy;” and to build up yourselves more and more upon it is your bounden duty. Seek then to advance continually *in the knowledge of it*, in all its bearings, and in all its relations. View the whole mystery as planned by Infinite Wisdom, and formed into a covenant of grace; the Father undertaking to accept an atonement in our behalf; the Son engaging to offer that atonement in his own sacred person; and the Holy Spirit engaging to bring to Christ those who should be given him of the Father, and those whom he should purchase with his most precious blood. Eternity

^a ver. 3, 4.

^b ver. 17, 18.

^c Col. ii. 6, 7.

itself will not suffice to explore the wonders contained in this mystery; and therefore, like the holy angels, we should incessantly be searching into it, with a view to comprehend, as far as our limited capacities can reach, the wisdom of God displayed in it — — —

We should seek to grow also *in a simple reliance* on the Gospel of Christ, as of itself perfectly suited to us, and altogether sufficient for the necessities of the whole world. It is impossible ever to be too jealous upon this head; since the mixing of any thing with this foundation will subvert it utterly, and make void all that Christ has done and suffered for us^d — — —

In a realizing sense of its excellency, we should also be making higher and higher attainments. There is a rest of the mind, and a satisfaction of the soul, which it is our privilege to possess; and which, in its sublimer actings, approximates very nearly to the felicity of the saints above. There is no measure of this in which we should rest. We are told, that, by believing in Christ, we may be elevated to “a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, and may already (by anticipation) receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls^e” — — —

Yet not in these respects only, but in every possible view, we should “be building up ourselves on our most holy faith,” and be daily manifesting our progress, and “making our profiting to appear” to all around us.]

At the same time be “praying continually in the Holy Ghost” —

[Of ourselves we can do nothing: our sufficiency even for a good thought, must be of God alone^f: and from him it must be sought by earnest prayer. “He will be inquired of by us, before he will do for us” what in his covenant of grace he has promised to us^g. If we ask not, we cannot have^h: but, if we ask in faith, we shall have our joy increased to the fullⁱ. We must therefore go to God continually; seeking from him in the first instance the “Spirit of grace and supplications^k,” by whose gracious influences alone we can approach him in an acceptable manner, and pray to him as we ought. “That blessed Spirit will help our infirmities;” and though he may not give us that fluency of utterance, or that enlargement of heart, which we may desire, “he will make intercession in us with groanings which cannot be uttered^l,” but which will enter the ears of our heavenly Father, “who knoweth the mind of

^d Gal. v. 2, 4.

^e 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^g Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^h Jam. iv. 2.

ⁱ John xvi. 24.

^k Zech. xii. 10.

^l Rom. viii. 26.

the Spirit^m," and will answer the petitions which are so dictated by him.

We are not indeed to expect any *miraculous* aid from the Holy Spirit: but a *gracious* influence we may expect; as St. Paul says, "Pray always with all prayer and supplication *in the Spirit*ⁿ." Nor need we be concerned whether we address our God in words conceived at the moment, or in a pre-composed form: it is the frame of mind which God regards: and, if that be spiritual, our prayer, even though it consist only of a sigh, or a groan, shall come up with acceptance before him^o, and shall bring down into our souls all the blessings both of grace and glory.

Whilst then we are building up ourselves on our most holy faith, we must be "pouring out our hearts before him" through the assistance of his good Spirit, and be bringing down from him such communications of grace and strength as our daily necessities require.]

The beneficial tendency of the two former directions being thus clear and manifest, let me call your attention,

II. To the two latter, as *perfective of your welfare*—

"Keep yourselves in the love of God"—

[*This was primary in the mind of the Apostle: the two preceding being urged only as conducive to it.* And certainly this is the great object which every Christian should keep in view, and at which he should aim day and night. To have a sense of "God's love shed abroad in the heart^p;" to "have the light of his countenance lifted up upon us^q;" to "be going to him continually as a Father^r;" to "walk with him," as Enoch did^s; and, like Abraham, to commune with him as a friend^t; to "set him always before us^u;" to have no wish or desire but to please him^x; to be "delighting ourselves in him^y," as our God, our portion, our eternal great reward^z: *this is our wisdom; this is our happiness; this is our security.* If we descend on lower ground, we are open to all manner of assaults: but who can reach us there? Who can break through to harm us, when we are "dwelling in God, and God is dwelling in us^a?" We are "encompassed as with a wall of fire^b;" we are in a fortress that is absolutely impregnable^c: we may defy the whole universe to "separate us from his love^d."]]

^m Rom. viii. 27.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 18.

^o Ps. xxxviii. 9

^p Rom. v. 5.

^q Numb. vi. 26.

^r Rom. viii. 15.

^s Gen. v. 24.

^t Jam. ii. 23.

^u Ps. xvi. 8.

^x Col. i. 10. Heb. xiii. 21.

^y Ps. xxxvii. 4.

^z Gen. xv. 1.

^a 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^b Zech. ii. 5.

^c Prov. xviii. 10.

^d Rom. viii. 39.

Let me then especially urge upon you this important duty. Live not at a distance from God: rest not in a formal acknowledgment of him: but endeavour to “walk worthy of him unto all pleasing:” get back, as far as possible, to the state of man in Paradise; and labour to walk as on the very borders of the eternal world. My beloved brethren, “let your conversation be thus in heaven^e:” and let all the faith which you exercise, and every prayer that you utter, be, as it were, a breeze to fill your sails, and bear you forward to your desired haven; that “so you may never fall, but have an abundant entrance ministered unto you into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^f.”]

“Look also for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” —

[However close your walk with God may be, you must not on that account lean in the least degree to your own righteousness, but must rely entirely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and expect “eternal life solely as the gift of God for Christ’s sake^g.” And for this you must be waiting, looking, longing, in a state of constant preparation, and of eager expectation. The very perfection of the Christian state on earth is this, to be “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God^h.” Of many in the Corinthian Church the Apostle says, “they came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christⁱ.” Do ye then aspire after the same blessed attainment. “Let your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom;” that, when he shall come, you may “enter in with him to the marriage feast.” Whilst you are in such a frame as this, all earthly things will lose their influence; and all attempts, whether of men or devils, to retard your progress be in vain. From my inmost soul therefore I would offer in behalf of you the prayer which St. Paul offered for the Thessalonian Church, *the prayer which so remarkably coincides with that of St. Jude in my text*, “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and a patient waiting for Christ^k.”]

APPLICATION —

[Settle it in your minds that *this* is true religion — — — *This* is the state in which it is both your duty and your privilege to live — — — and so living you are sure of mercy, and cannot fail of attaining that eternal life which the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for you — — —]

^e Phil. iii. 20.

^h 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^f 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 8.

^g Rom. vi. 23.

^k 2 Thess. iii. 5.

MMCCCCLXXIV.

AN ASCRIPTION OF PRAISE TO JEHOVAH.

Jude 24, 25. *Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

BY many this Doxology is considered as addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ: but though it is certain that by all the heavenly choir our most adorable Saviour is worshipped as one with the Father, without any distinction whatsoever, and that he is to be honoured in all respects by *us* precisely as the Father, yet we must be cautious never to strain any portion of Scripture for the purpose of honouring him; for, if we do, we give advantage to those who deny his proper Divinity, to represent all our worship of him as unauthorized and erroneous. The more fully we are assured of any doctrine, the more careful we should be not to establish it on a weak foundation; lest, when the foundation on which we have indiscreetly built is shaken, we be led to doubt the truth of the doctrine itself. Of the Divinity of our blessed Lord we have no more doubt than of any other truth of our holy religion: but in the passage before us we apprehend, that it is not to *Him in particular* that this Doxology is addressed, but to the Father. For, in several other passages, the Father beyond all doubt is addressed, and under the same character as is here described. St. Paul concludes his Epistle to the Romans thus: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you, to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever^a." In the Epistle to the Ephesians he again speaks in similar terms: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end^b." So again, in his First Epistle to Timothy he says, "Now unto the King

^a Rom. xvi. 25, 27.

^b Eph. iii. 20, 21.

eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen^c." Those who would apply our text to Christ, think that it must refer to him, because he alone (as they imagine) presents his Church before the presence of his Father's glory: as it is said, "He loved the Church and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, &c.^d" But the very same thing is spoken of the Father also, of whom it is said, that, "by Christ, the Father reconciled all things to himself, even in the body of his flesh through death, to present us holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight^e." I consider the text therefore as addressed to the Father: and, in order to a suitable improvement of it, will set before you,

I. The character of Jehovah as here described—

His wisdom and his power are altogether infinite: and we might, not improperly, speak of those two perfections as they are delineated in the Holy Scriptures. But I conceive, that, though mentioned generally in the text, we should notice them *not as existing in himself, but as exercised towards his Church.*

Wonderful is *the wisdom* which he has displayed in his dealings with his people—

[Contemplate the plan of salvation through the incarnation and death of his only-begotten Son — — — What unfathomable depths of wisdom are here? — — — Well is it called, "The wisdom of God in a mystery!" To contemplate that, will be the employment of eternity.

Nor, if we entered into his particular dispensations towards his people, would this perfection appear in less bright colours; so "unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." The experience of every saint will furnish abundant matter for adoration through all eternity; for "he has abounded towards every one of them in all wisdom and prudence" — — —]

Nor is *the power* which he exercises towards them less stupendous—

[View the temptations with which every saint is beset — — — the enemies, even all the hosts of hell, with whom he has to contend — — — his utter incapacity to do any thing

^c 1 Tim. i. 17.

^d Eph. v. 25, 27.

^e Col. i. 19—22.

of himself — — — and yet his conflicts, his victories, and his triumphs — — — Must not that power be wonderful that is able to keep him, and effectual for his preservation even to the end? Yes verily, it is no less a power than that which was put forth to raise the Lord Jesus Christ himself from the dead, and to exalt him above all the principalities and powers both of heaven and hell^f.]

It is by *the united and continued exercise* of these two perfections, that he becomes “our Saviour” —

[In the name of “Saviour” he glories; and under that character he loves to be viewed by us. His perfections would indeed be the same, though never put forth for us, any more than for the fallen angels: but, as they are so exercised for our welfare, it becomes us to contemplate them in that particular view, and to render to him the praise which such manifestations of them demand. Reflect a moment on him as a “Saviour!” not merely as preserving us in our conflicts here, but as “presenting us faultless before the presence of his glory” in the world above — — — One moment’s reflection upon his character in that view, will abundantly suffice to shew you,]

II. The dispositions with which it should be contemplated —

Beyond all doubt our hearts should be lifted up with devoutest affection towards him, as the Apostle’s was; and should be filled,

1. With love —

[Review the character before described, and say, whether, though you yourselves were not the objects of his care, the very existence of those perfections ought not to endear him to your souls? How much more then, when from all eternity they have been consecrated to your service, and destined to be exercised for your good! — — — I call you then to love him, with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul, and all your strength — — —]

2. With gratitude —

[Go to the world above, and see and hear how all the glorified saints are occupied around the throne: what songs of praise are they singing night and day to God, and to the Lamb! How do they all labour for utterance; and, by the very accumulation of the terms by which they strive to evince their gratitude, shew how inadequate even the language of heaven itself is to express the feelings of their hearts^g — — — Thus

^f Eph. i. 19—21.

^g Rev. v. 9—13.

then should it be with us: our whole life should be, as theirs is, one continued song of praise and thanksgiving^h — — — Only consider what would have been your state at this hour, and to all eternity, if less wisdom or power had been put forth for you, and you will need no inducement to ascribe to him the glory due unto his name.]

3. With affiance—

[Where will you look for help, if not to him? Of whom besides can it be said that he has either wisdom or power to do such great things for you? With him alone is either wisdom or might sufficient for you. Go then to him: spread before him your every want: expect from him a supply in every hour of need, a supply suited to your wants and sufficient for your necessities. Never for a moment entertain a doubt of his kindness, his care, his all-sufficiency: for he is *God*, and not man; and therefore ye have not been consumed hitherto, nor shall any enemy prevail against you. Only bear in mind that “He is for you;” and you may defy all the assaults both of earth and hell.]

CONCLUSION—

[At the close of his Doxology, the Apostle adds, Amen. Do ye also add, Amen, in the very same spirit as he did, and in the same spirit that the angelic hosts are doing it above. And seek to live in this spirit every day, and all the day long. Then, when death shall call you hence, you shall change your place, but not your employment; your sorrows, but not your songs.]

^h Ps. cxlv. 1—7.

END OF VOL. XX.