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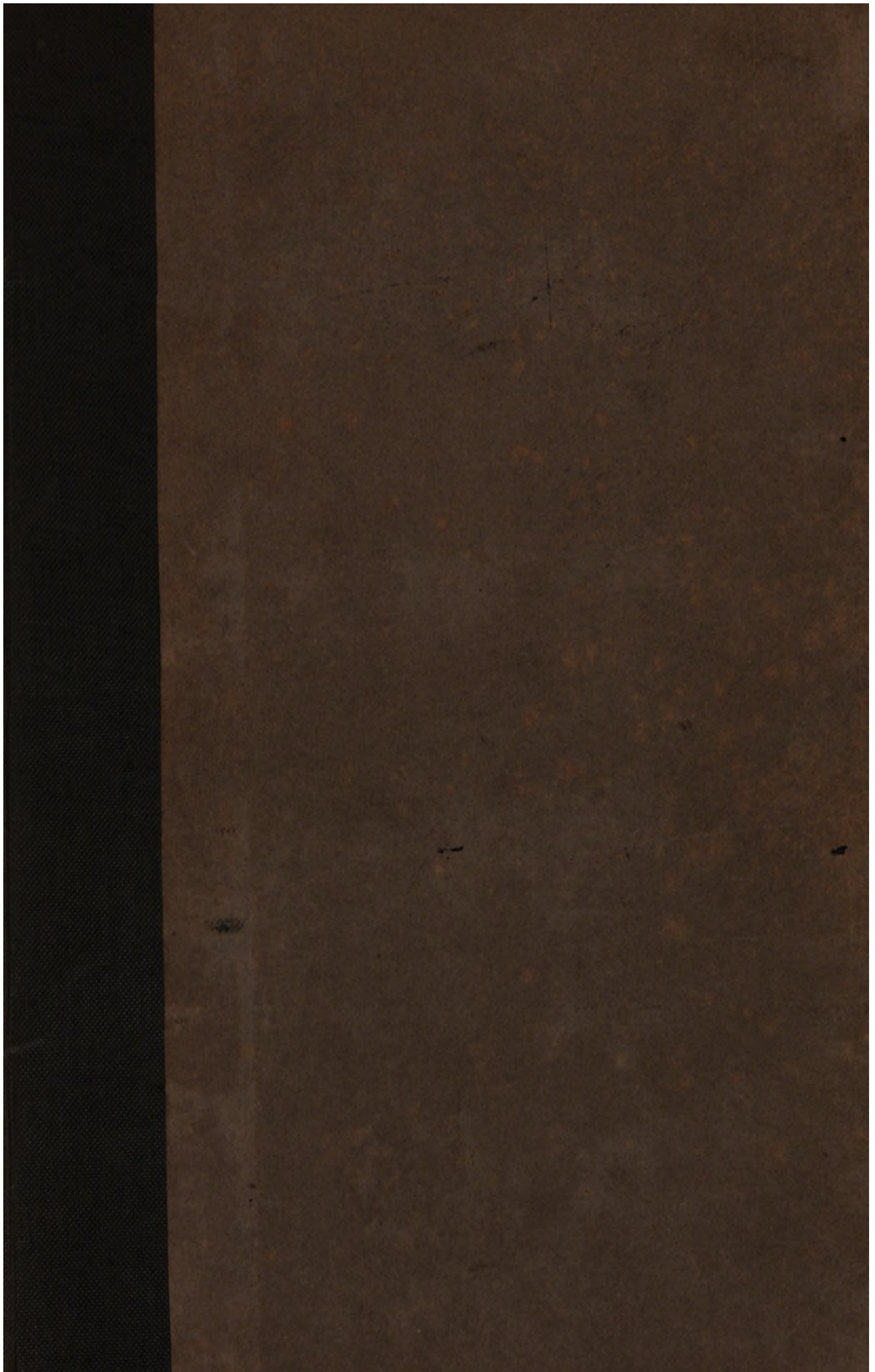
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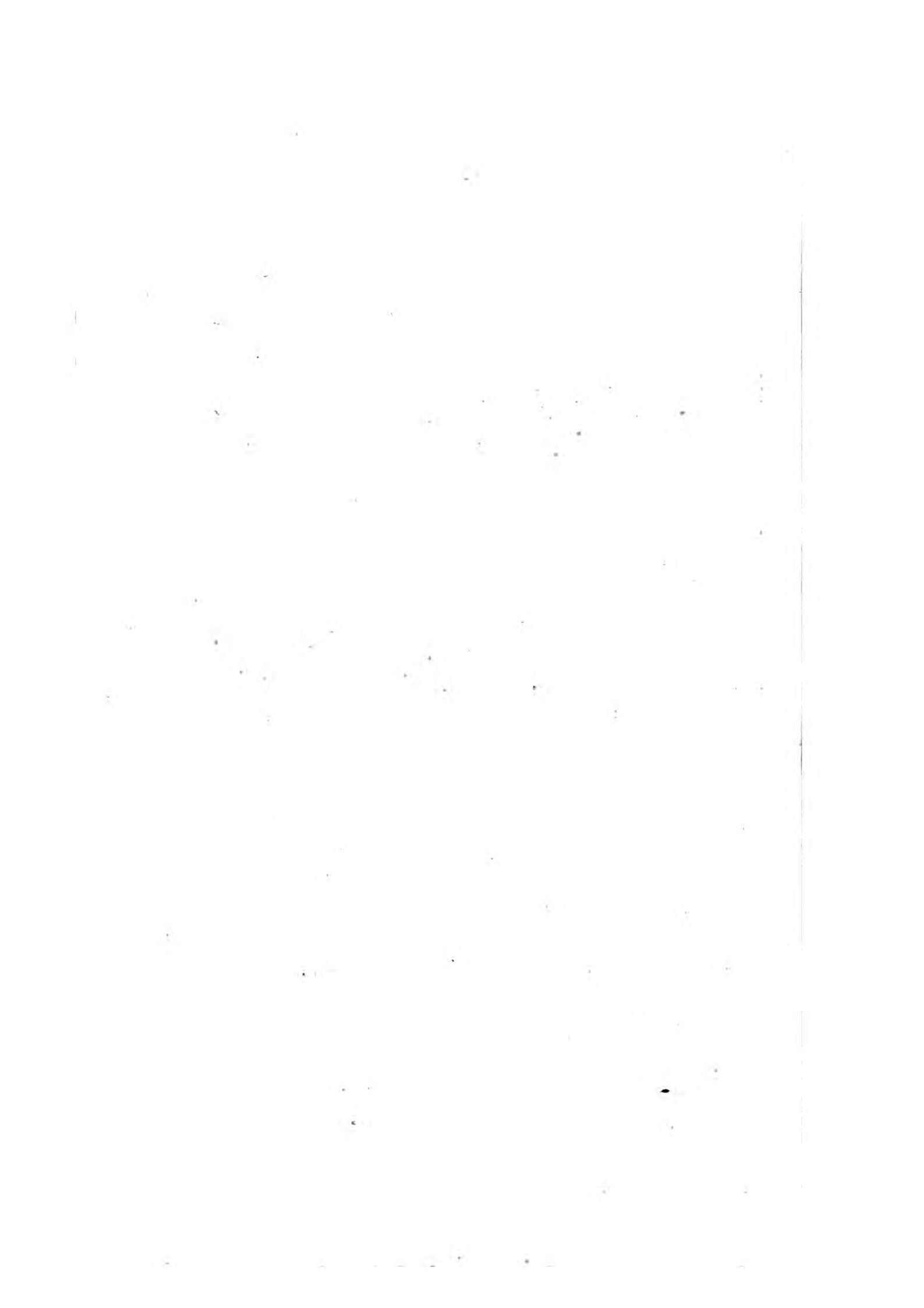
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IX.





EXPLANATORY DISCOURSES

ON

THE EPISTLES

In the Book of Common Prayer,

FOR EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR

AND

THE PRINCIPAL FESTIVALS

OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND:

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. WERBURGH, BRISTOL.

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BY

THE REV. JOHN HALL, B. D.

RECTOR OF THE SAID PARISH.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

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LONDON:

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.,

AND J. CHILCOTT, BRISTOL.

MDCCCXXXIX.



## P R E F A C E.

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THE following Sermons are a sequel to two former volumes on the Gospels appointed in the Book of Common Prayer to be read on every Sunday in the year, and the principal festivals of the United Church of England and Ireland. They were written in regular weekly succession for the Sunday morning's service, and were preached in the parish church of St. Werburgh, in the city of Bristol. They are now printed with the same object as the former volumes, to supply families in the middle ranks of society with plain discourses, which may be suitable for reading on Sunday evenings, particularly in country places, where there is no service on that part of the Lord's day in the parish church.

The testimonies which the author has had that his former volumes have been made useful, through the blessing of the great Head of the church, to the edification and comfort of some who have perused them, has afforded him encouragement to pursue his plan, and



commit these discourses also to the press. The truths contained in them have brought consolation to his own mind in the season of sickness, and in the prospect of eternity: and he trusts that they may be the means of benefiting many who read or hear them, in the like manner.

It has been his desire, according to his ability, to make the scripture its own interpreter; and to have the minds of his hearers and readers imbued with scriptural knowledge, which is the most important knowledge in the world, being that which is derived from Divine revelation. He has also adhered, as far as possible, to the words of the authorised translation, with which he deems it advisable that all classes of persons should be familiar. It is his earnest prayer that the blessing of the Holy Spirit may attend this humble attempt to explain the truths of the everlasting gospel, as they are set forth in the Apostolical Epistles, to the glory of God, and the everlasting salvation of those into whose hands these volumes may come. Worldly honour or fame he seeks not; "to serve God for the promoting of His glory, and the edifying of His people," the object for which he was set apart to the office of the Ministry, is all his desire. If this be effected, his end will be attained.

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### A PRAYER BEFORE SERMON.

BLESSED LORD, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

---

### THE LORD'S PRAYER.

OUR FATHER which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven: Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil; For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

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### A PRAYER AFTER SERMON.

GRANT, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may through Thy grace be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of Thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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### THE APOSTOLICAL BENEDICTION.

THE grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. Amen.

# SERMON I.

FOR

## THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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### THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT.

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Romans xiii. 12.

THE NIGHT IS FAR SPENT, THE DAY IS AT HAND: LET US THEREFORE CAST OFF THE WORKS OF DARKNESS, AND LET US PUT ON THE ARMOUR OF LIGHT.

THE Epistle for this day, on which our ecclesiastical year commences, appears to have been selected on account of the reference made in the text to *the day being at hand* when *the children of God*, who have become such *by faith in Christ Jesus*, shall be admitted to partake of that eternal salvation to which it is their privilege to look forward. This expression may lead us also to turn our thoughts to that day which dawned upon our benighted world, when the heavenly hosts sang in joyful concert, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.* May we be enabled to commemorate, at this



season, the advent of our most adorable Redeemer, with gratitude and praise for the benefits which have been bestowed upon us in consequence of His incarnation; and to look forward with joyful expectation to His second coming, when He shall appear again for the salvation of His believing people.

The Epistle for this day begins with the exhortation, *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.* In the verse before it, the apostle had said, *Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.* He first showed that it was the duty of Christians to support the government of the country in which they lived, by the payment of the lawful taxes, which it imposed; and then to avoid being in debt to any person whatever; to discharge all debts but one, which can never be discharged, that of love towards each other. This is Christian principle. It proceeds from the love of God having been shed abroad in the heart, and producing the love of our neighbour as its necessary result. If this principle operate in our minds, it will lead us to fulfil, with alacrity, every moral obligation. But if the existence and operation of this principle be a test of Christianity, how many are there, it is to be feared, who imagine themselves entitled to the honourable name of Christians, that cannot stand the test? A profession

of Christianity requires us to *provide things honest in the sight of all men,*<sup>1</sup> and not to defraud or injure those who may be disposed to give credit to our religious profession. The apostle says, *He that loveth his brother, hath fulfilled the law.* It has been observed, that “the demeanour of men towards the second table of the law, is a sure trial how they stand affected towards the first.” This the apostle John intimates, when he makes the inquiry, *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*<sup>2</sup> To show what he meant by the law, our apostle gives a summary of it; *For this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* This is the manner in which the law of God requires mankind to act towards each other. And therefore it is evident that, *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* They who are under the influence of the Christian principle of love to God and man, will be good members of society; will live in the observance of every moral and relative duty; in subjection to the government of their country; and in good-will towards all around them.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John iv. 20.

The apostle shows, however, that this is not only our duty, but our interest. *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed.* To every individual, the time of this life will soon be over. We have but a short season to live in this world. Every day brings the time nearer to that blessed period, when those who have believed through grace shall receive *the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls,*<sup>3</sup> when they shall go to be for ever with *the Lord.*<sup>4</sup> It becomes them, therefore, to spend the few days that are allotted to them here on earth, to the honour and praise of Him *who hath called them unto His kingdom and glory.*<sup>5</sup> On this consideration is founded the exhortation contained in the text: *The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light;* and in the two following verses, which may be regarded as a further explanation of it: *Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

In the words to which our attention is more particularly to be directed, we may observe,

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter i. 9.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Thess. iv. 7.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 12.

*First*, two opposite things contrasted ; and,  
*Secondly*, an exhortation founded upon them.

First, *Night and the works of darkness, and the day and the armour of light*, are spoken of as being allied to each other respectively. This mortal life is compared to the night, which is a season of darkness and ignorance ; *for they that sleep, sleep in the night*, during which time they are ignorant of what is passing around them ; *and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night* ;<sup>6</sup> when they are not so open to observation as in the day-time. Thieves and robbers, for this reason, choose the night for the time of their depredations ; debauchery, and all those deeds of which people are ashamed, are also in general committed during the night ; and therefore these works altogether are called *the works of darkness*, by which all intemperate, sensual, and malignant passions, and inordinate desires are denominated.

This mortal life then is compared to the night,

*First*, In consequence of the abounding of iniquity in the world in which we live. The works of darkness are practised openly by numbers ; of whom the Psalmist says, *They know not, neither will they understand, they walk on still in darkness.*<sup>7</sup> This is true of the world now, as it was before the Christian era. However the state of society may have been ameliorated by the diffusion of

<sup>6</sup> 1 Thess. v. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm lxxxii. 5.

Christianity, still the works of darkness are practised. Many who bear the name of Christians *walk as the Gentiles walked*, or live as the heathen did in the days of the apostles, *in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; and being past feeling, give themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.* This shows that they *have not learned Christ, or been taught by Him*, that they have not received *the truth as it is in Jesus*,<sup>8</sup> that *the love of God is not in them*; for the apostle John declares, *If we say that we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*<sup>9</sup> To the true Christian, the ungodly conduct of those around him will always be a matter of grief. He will say with the Psalmist, *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they keep not Thy law.*<sup>10</sup> But while he grieves, he will *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*<sup>8</sup> The sin that dwelleth in him is, however, his greatest grief. This he bewails before his heavenly Father, and prays, with the Psalmist, *Cleanse Thou me from secret faults; keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.*<sup>10</sup> Against these

<sup>8</sup> Eph. iv. 18—21, v. 11. <sup>9</sup> 1 John i. 6. <sup>10</sup> Ps. cxix. 158, xix. 12, 13.



he wrestles and wars in the strength of *the Lord* and in the power of *His might*, that they may not prevail over him, and bring disgrace upon his religious profession, and dishonour to God.

This mortal life is compared to the night,

*Secondly*, Because of the ignorance of God which prevails among mankind. The fear of God is not before the eyes of men, because they know Him not. It is said, *The sons of Eli were sons of Belial, they knew not the Lord.*<sup>11</sup> But even in those who do know the Lord, *or rather are known of Him*, how much ignorance prevails. The apostle said respecting himself, *Now I know in part : we know in part, and we prophesy in part : for now we see through a glass darkly.*<sup>12</sup> He who knows himself, feels his ignorance of Divine things, and his dulness of apprehension concerning them, because sin has so benumbed all the faculties of his soul, that he does not apprehend them as he ought. Visible and temporal things have such a hold upon his heart and mind, that those which are invisible and eternal do not affect him as their importance demands. As the night is a time of sleep and forgetfulness, so it is said, that *while the Bridegroom tarried, the wise as well as the foolish virgins, all slumbered and slept.*<sup>13</sup> Hence the apostle thought it needful to exhort the Thessalonians, *Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel ii. 12.    <sup>12</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12.    <sup>13</sup> Mat. xxv. 5.

During this night of darkness, of sin and ignorance, the Christian is exposed to the assaults of unbelief, and to temptations of various kinds; but throughout it he is ready to say with the Psalmist, *I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait; my soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.*<sup>15</sup> To such persons the apostle proclaims, *The night is far spent.* The time of this mortal life will soon come to an end. To the most of those who hear this proclamation, it is far spent indeed! Advancing years declare it plainly. And *there is but a step between any of us and death.*<sup>16</sup> Young and old are both cut off by it; and we none of us know how soon we may be called out of this world. But mankind in general have no idea that this mortal life is fitly compared to the night. This is known or perceived only by those who *are not of night, nor of darkness.*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, to hear of life being far spent, is to many a most unwelcome sound. They would rather not hear of it. They would be glad if they could live in this world always, and never leave it. If such be the case with any of us, oh! let us seek grace from God to prepare us for the end of life; that we may be ready to meet death, whenever the summons may come. *The end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer.*<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thess. v. 5, 6.    <sup>15</sup> Ps. cxxx. 5, 6.    <sup>16</sup> 1 Sam. xx. 3.

To the season of this mortal life, the apostle opposes another, as far more desirable to the Christian, as much more desirable as day is than night. He says, *The day is at hand*: the day when the believing people of God shall rise to the life immortal; the day *when the Lord Jesus Christ shall come again in His glorious majesty, to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*<sup>18</sup> In that great day He will also appear as the Judge of the living and the dead. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*<sup>19</sup> The apostle shows us, in the text, how we are to be prepared for this great day of the Lord. He exhorts,

*Secondly, Let us put on the armour of light; and again, Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.* This armour is otherwise called, *The breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*<sup>20</sup> This is *the armour of light*, in which those who are looking for the coming of the day of the Lord, ought to be equipped. In the Collect for this day, we are reminded, by being taught to pray for it, that the grace of God is needful, to enable us to comply with the apostolical exhortation. We may become acquainted with the theory of Divine truth, by the exercise of our mental faculties;

<sup>17</sup> 1 Peter iv. 7.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Thess. i. 10.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Cor. v. 10.

but without the influence of the Spirit of God upon our hearts, which we are taught to implore in earnest prayer, we shall not know it to any saving, or any practical purpose. It is by the grace of the Spirit of God that the Christian is equipped with *the armour of light, the breastplate of faith in Christ, and love to Him.*<sup>20</sup> If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love Him above all things, we put Him on as our armour to defend us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies; so that having Him for our Protector and Shield, they shall not be able to prevail against us. Faith in Him and love to Him protect the heart, since by them we rightly appreciate in some measure the benefits which are received.

Faith in Christ lays hold of His atonement, whereby pardon is brought home to the conscience. In the sacrifice of the death of Christ, the believer sees the desert of sin, how hateful it must be to the God of infinite holiness; and the reality of that *wrath of God which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*<sup>21</sup> In viewing the atonement made by Christ, sin is seen to be no light thing, but a real evil, with which God cannot possibly be reconciled. This leads to a hatred of sin, such as cannot be derived from any other source. Faith in Christ also lays hold of His righteousness, by

<sup>20</sup> 1 Thess. v. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Rom. i. 18.

which the believer is justified before God, and accepted in His holy presence; so that for Christ's sake he can draw nigh to God as his Father, to implore His protection and His blessing.

With this faith in Christ is joined love to Him. Love promotes gratitude and obedience. His believing people know that they have received great benefits from Him; and they therefore *love Him, because He first loved them.*<sup>22</sup> They know that His love to them was extended freely, without any merit or desert on their part; this makes them thankful, and desirous to evince their gratitude in the way that He has commanded them to do it. Hence it is said that *Love is the fulfilling of the law.* Love to Christ makes obedience to all His commandments pleasant to His believing people. Thus by faith and love they are defended and preserved from falling under the power of their spiritual enemies, and are enabled *with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord.*<sup>23</sup>

It is by the grace of the Spirit of God also, that *the hope of salvation* is made to cover the head as *a helmet*; so that he who possesses it, is encouraged and emboldened to *fight the good fight of faith*<sup>24</sup> against the enemies of his soul, the world, the flesh, and the devil; and to *press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*<sup>25</sup> The hope of salvation enables

<sup>22</sup> 1 John iv. 19. <sup>23</sup> Acts xi. 23. <sup>24</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 12. <sup>25</sup> Phil. iii. 14.

him to lift up his head with confidence, and to go on his way *rejoicing in hope of the glory of God*,<sup>26</sup> notwithstanding the conviction which he entertains of his unworthiness to partake of so great a blessing.

Such is *the armour of light* with which the Christian warrior is equipped to fight the battles of the Lord against his spiritual adversaries. He who is clad in this armour, is described also as having *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*. For they who believe in Him, and love Him, and hope in Him, may thankfully say, *In the Lord have I righteousness and strength* ;<sup>27</sup> righteousness in which to stand with acceptance in the presence of God, and strength to run in the way of His commandments, and to oppose all the assaults and temptations of the powers of darkness.

The exhortation of the apostle in the text is two-fold, corresponding with the statement that he had made. *As the night is far spent*, he exhorts, *Let us put off the works of darkness, and not make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. As the day is at hand*, he adds, *Let us put on the armour of light* ; or, which is the same thing, *Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ*. Here are enemies and temptations to be renounced and resisted. Here also are duties to be performed. The Christian life is a course of self-denial with

<sup>26</sup> Rom. v. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Is. xlv. 24.



regard to *the desires of the flesh and of the mind*,<sup>28</sup> and to those deeds which the enemy of mankind tempts men to commit, and for which the world affords every facility. These we are to cast away from us, to put off, not to indulge in, not to practise. And in order to strengthen our resolutions, and incite us further to avoid these evils, we are assured that, *Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience*.<sup>29</sup> Yet, alas! how vain are argument and exhortation in opposition to the depraved appetite of fallen man. He who gives the exhortation, or commands His ministers to deliver it, must Himself give the power to enable us to comply with it in the hour of temptation. We shall never *cast off the works of darkness*, unless power from on high enable us to do it. For this it becomes us to pray earnestly, that He who has commanded us respecting what we ought to avoid and what to do, would give us His grace or strengthen us *with might by His Spirit in the inner man*,<sup>30</sup> that we may comply with His exhortations, and resist the temptations of our spiritual adversaries. What Satan tempts us to do in opposition to the commands of God, is in order to ensure the ruin of our souls; that we may be placed in the same awful circumstances with himself, in the regions of darkness and despair for evermore. When

<sup>28</sup> Eph. ii. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Eph. v. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Eph. iii. 16.

such is his object, how careful should we be to abstain from whatever will be so injurious to us, and will gratify the malignity of the enemy of God and man, who envies to the creatures of God the happiness which he himself has forfeited. Let us then *cast off the works of darkness*, which afford so little transitory gratification, and bring destruction in their train. And *let us put on the armour of light, the Lord Jesus Christ*; that, having our faith and hope in Him, and loving Him above all things, we may be defended by His mighty power, and be made *more than conquerors through Him that loved us*,<sup>31</sup> over all the power of the enemy. We are to put Him on as our armour, which is proof against all the weapons of our adversaries. We are to make Him our refuge, being assured that, under His protection, we are safe from all assault. He is a shield of salvation to all that put their trust in Him. He will defend them from all evil, and not suffer any thing hurtful to come near them, much less to injure or prevail against them.

The exhortations in the text are enforced by the consideration, that *the night is far spent, and the day is at hand*. This mortal life will soon come to an end. The day of eternity dawns upon the horizon. Let not any then sleep securely in sin, lest they should *wake to shame and*

<sup>31</sup> Rom. viii. 37.



*everlasting contempt*<sup>32</sup> in the great day of God, which is at hand. It is declared of that *day of the Lord*, that it will be a day of *darkness, and not of light*,<sup>33</sup> to many. God grant that this may not be its character to any of us; but while we are reminded of its approach, may we seek earnestly to be prepared for it.

We are taught by our church at this season, to look forward from the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, to His second coming. These two are so connected together, that those only who are made partakers of the blessings which He came into the world to bestow by His first advent, will be prepared for the second. Let us ask ourselves whether this be our case? By the profession which we make of being Christians, we declare that it is. But will our profession stand the test of the scrutiny of the *great and very terrible day of the Lord*?<sup>34</sup> Alas! how many are there who call themselves Christians, who are not ashamed to do openly those things which the word of God condemns. Let such be persuaded to repent, and pray to God for Christ's sake to forgive them their trespasses, lest the day of judgment should overtake them; and, dying in their sins, they should *fall into the hands of the living God*,<sup>35</sup> the Avenger of sin.

But if I address those who have so far *cast off the*

<sup>32</sup> Daniel xii. 2. <sup>33</sup> Amos v. 18. <sup>34</sup> Joel ii. 11. <sup>35</sup> Heb. x. 31.

*works of darkness*, that their conduct in society is moral and respectable, and free from reproach; allow me to ask you, Have you *put on the armour of light*? Have you *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*? Unless faith in Christ and love to Him influence our hearts and lives, and the hope of salvation through Him animate us to run in the way of God's commandments, and to turn from every evil way, we have reason to fear lest *that day should overtake us as a thief*.<sup>36</sup> Let us then pray earnestly, that these gifts of Divine grace may be vouchsafed to us.

And let those who have believed through grace remember, that it is only by faith in Christ and love to Him that their hearts will be kept in the fear of God. By faith in Christ you will walk with God, as your Father. By love to Christ, you will be constrained to live in obedience to His holy commandments. By having the hope of salvation through Christ before your eyes continually, you will be preserved from turning aside to the right hand or to the left, and be led to walk suitably to your high and holy and heavenly calling, *as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*.<sup>37</sup> May we then *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*,<sup>38</sup> but *when His glory shall be revealed, may be glad also with exceeding joy*.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> 1 Thess. v. 4. <sup>37</sup> Rom. viii. 17. <sup>38</sup> 1 John ii. 28. <sup>39</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 13.

## SERMON II.

FOR

### THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

---

THE BENEFIT OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

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Romans xv. 4.

FOR WHATSOEVER THINGS WERE WRITTEN  
AFORETIME WERE WRITTEN FOR OUR  
LEARNING; THAT WE, THROUGH PATIENCE  
AND COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES, MIGHT  
HAVE HOPE.

THE glory of God, and the welfare of his fellow-creatures actuated the mind of the apostle Paul in the whole course of his ministry. To promote these objects, he recommended the holy scriptures of the Old Testament to the diligent perusal of the persons to whom he addressed his Epistles. And he was particularly desirous that they should regard the sacred volume of inspiration as a testimony concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the pattern that His believing people are to set before them for their imitation. In the verse before the text, he speaks of Him

as the great pattern of humility, which appeared especially in the reproaches that He meekly endured; since, as St. Peter observes, *when He was reviled, He reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.*<sup>40</sup> So likewise our apostle states, that *even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me.* This was foretold respecting Him by the Psalmist.<sup>41</sup> From thence he makes the inference in the text; and follows it up with a prayer and exhortation on the subject of brotherly love, which he had before inculcated. Let it be our prayer, brethren, that while our attention is directed to the subjects brought before us in the Epistle for this day, the Spirit of God may be pleased to seal instruction upon our minds, that we may derive from them the consolation and hope towards God, which they were designed to convey to us.

The prayer which was offered up by the apostle is as follows: *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus.* By calling the Lord God *the God of patience and consolation*, he intimates that these blessings are His gifts, which He bestows of the riches of His grace upon them that wait upon Him. *Patience is*

<sup>40</sup> 1 Peter ii. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Psalm lxi. 9.

needed most especially by those who are suffering affliction of some kind or other. The afflicted children of God are encouraged to look up to Him for grace to enable them patiently to endure what He sees fit to lay upon them. And they have set before them as their example the patience of their Lord and Saviour under all His unparalleled sufferings. What we may be called to suffer, is far less than our iniquity deserves; and to the believer in Christ the sting is taken out of every affliction, since his Surety bore the curse due to sin, and therefore it shall not be visited upon him. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*<sup>42</sup> It is the mourner also who needs *consolation*. If we mourn because of sin that dwelleth in us, for which we have most reason to mourn, we may be comforted by the consideration that we have not to sorrow, as He did, who endured the wrath of God, that He might deliver us from it. When we meditate on the patience of Christ, it will surely make us patient in suffering the will of God; and patient also in making allowances for the conduct of others towards us. And we shall bless our adorable Redeemer for having condescended to be bereaved of consolation in the hour of His agony, that we might be comforted with the recollection of what He endured in our stead.

<sup>42</sup> Gal. iii. 13.

The apostle prayed that the Roman Christians might receive grace from *the God of patience and consolation* to conform them to the image of Christ Jesus, in order that they might be *likeminded* with Him in their endeavours, *every one to please his neighbour for his good to edification*; since the *strong in faith ought to bear the infirmities of the weak*, and to do all in their power to encourage rather than to dishearten them; and there should be a mutual sympathy among all the members of the mystical body of Christ, and a desire to edify one another, or to *build up* each other on their *most holy faith*.<sup>43</sup>

The object proposed by this love of the brethren was, *that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The promotion of the glory of God was that which the apostle had always at heart, that He might be glorified by all His people, with one heart and voice; for this he knew would be for their own happiness. But it is as *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* especially, that God is glorified by the children of men; as having, in His love and compassion to our fallen race, *given His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*.<sup>44</sup> If we are enabled to behold the God of heaven as our reconciled Father

<sup>43</sup> Jude 20.

<sup>44</sup> John iii. 16.



in Christ Jesus, we shall be disposed to praise and magnify His holy name for His mercy and loving-kindness manifested towards us through His beloved Son our Redeemer. And we shall be ready to imitate the example which our blessed Saviour has left us; according to the exhortation of the apostle, *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.* To *receive* means to show kindness and render assistance to the weak in faith, and to endeavour to strengthen and edify them. We are to do this, remembering the vastness of our obligations to Him *who loved us and gave Himself for us.*<sup>45</sup> Thus we are to *bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*<sup>46</sup> We see how the apostle presses the example of Christ upon His people. It is important to observe this, and to implore His grace to conform us to His holy will, and to enable us to seek His glory as our end and aim at all times.

The apostle next speaks of the coming of Christ, and the objects proposed or effected by means of it; which seems to be the reason why this portion of scripture is appointed for this day. *Now I say, that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. He was born under the law,*<sup>47</sup> and submitted to its ceremonial rites

<sup>45</sup> Gal. ii. 20.<sup>46</sup> Gal. vi. 2.<sup>47</sup> Gal. iv. 4.

and observances, as a proof that He was the promised Seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He appeared among the ancient people of God *for the truth of God*, to show the truth of His word, which cannot lie. It was thus proved that the word of God was the truth. The people of God had looked for the fulfilment of His promises contained in His word. And *when the fulness of time was come*,<sup>48</sup> it was found that they had not been made in vain; their truth was confirmed by the appearing of the Seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head. For this purpose it was that He was born in Bethlehem of Judea, *and sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.<sup>49</sup>

But there was a further design of God in the gift of His Son to mankind, which was not developed until His own nation had rejected Him, and put Him to death. Then, after He had risen from the dead, He commanded His apostles *to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*.<sup>50</sup> Our apostle shows the Gentile Christians that this had been foretold in the Old Testament. The blessings of the salvation of Christ were not to be confined to the Jews, but were to be extended to heathen lands; *that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee*

<sup>48</sup> Gal. iv. 4.   <sup>49</sup> Mat. xv. 24.   <sup>50</sup> Mark xvi. 15.   <sup>51</sup> Ps. xviii. 49.



*among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name.*<sup>51</sup> It was Divine mercy which caused the Son of God to come down from heaven, to be the Saviour of lost sinners. And this manifestation of it demands from those to whom it is declared, that they should glorify and praise Him who hath had mercy upon them. That the Gentiles were to be blessed by the coming of Christ the Redeemer, the apostle shows from passages taken from the three different divisions of the scriptures of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets. Of Moses he declares, *Again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people.*<sup>52</sup> Of the Psalmist, *And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him all ye people.*<sup>53</sup> Of the prophets, *And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust.*<sup>54</sup> Here it appears to have been foretold, that when the Gentiles should hear the word of the truth of the gospel, they would receive it with joy; they would praise the Giver of all goodness, and put their trust in Him, and submit themselves to His government; that He might reign over them, to whom of right the dominion belonged.

As our Lord Jesus Christ was to be the hope and confidence of the Gentiles; the apostle prays,

<sup>52</sup> Deut. xxxii. 43.      <sup>53</sup> Psalm cxvii. 11.      <sup>54</sup> Isai. xi. 10.

*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.* As those who had looked for redemption<sup>55</sup> in Israel, and patiently waited for the fulfilment of the sure word of prophecy, were comforted when the Redeemer of mankind did make His appearance; which was the case with Anna the prophetess, and the devout Simeon, in an especial manner; so the apostle prays that the Gentiles to whom he wrote might be comforted, that they might have *joy and peace in believing* in the long expected Saviour, that their hope of blessings to be derived through Him and from Him might abound; and this by the Holy Spirit influencing their minds; since the *hope* which He communicates *maketh not ashamed*,<sup>56</sup> the *peace* which He gives *passeth all understanding*,<sup>57</sup> the *joy* with which He fills the hearts of His people is *joy unspeakable and full of glory*.<sup>58</sup>

This prayer corresponds with the observation with which the apostle had set out in the text; where the purpose for which the holy scriptures were left on record, is stated in a fourfold point of view. They were written,

*First*, For our learning;

*Secondly*, To lead us to the exercise of patience;

*Thirdly*, For our comfort; and,

<sup>55</sup> Luke ii. 38.    <sup>56</sup> Rom. v. 5.    <sup>57</sup> Phil. iv. 7.    <sup>58</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.

*Fourthly, To give us hope towards God.*

*Whatsoever things were written aforetime, by holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,<sup>59</sup> were written,*

*First, For our learning, or instruction; that we might know the things which belong to our peace and salvation. The apostle wrote in like manner to Timothy, his dearly beloved son in the faith of the gospel; All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. And he spoke of it as a high privilege which had been conferred upon him, from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>60</sup> To be learned in the holy scriptures is the most important learning in the world; when the truths of the gospel of Christ, which are revealed in the word of God, are brought home with power to the heart and conscience, by the power of the Holy Ghost; otherwise even this learning is to no saving purpose. He who gave His word is graciously pleased to apply it to the hearts of them that hear it; so that they receive the truth in the love of it, and not merely assent to it with the mind and understanding.*

<sup>59</sup> 1 Pet. i. 21.

<sup>60</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17, 15.

For this illumination of the Spirit of God it becomes us to pray earnestly when we read or hear the word of God, that it may prove the word of life and salvation to our souls. If we have *learned Christ*, as He is revealed in the holy scriptures, by the teaching of the Spirit of God, we have acquired the most useful and valuable of learning. All other learning perishes with its possessor, but this lasts for ever. To be made acquainted with the testimony of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, so as to be led to put our trust in Him, as the only Saviour of perishing sinners, and being *reconciled to God by the death of His Son*,<sup>61</sup> to draw nigh to Him, and enjoy communion and fellowship with Him in prayer and praise as His children, is the most important learning in the world. The learning of languages, and of the arts and sciences, as they are termed, is useful for this life. By these men become eminent in society, may benefit their fellow creatures, and increase their own enjoyments. But this kind of learning dies with us. When the breath leaves the body it is of no further use.

If we have not *learned Christ, as the truth is in Jesus*,<sup>62</sup> we are living *without God in the world*,<sup>63</sup> that is, without having Him as our Father and Friend, reconciled to us through His beloved

<sup>61</sup> Rom. v. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Eph. iv. 20, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Eph. ii. 12.

Son ; and dying in this state, however great and extensive our learning may be, and however useful to others or to ourselves for this life, being *without Christ*, we can *have no good hope*<sup>62</sup> of everlasting salvation. The great thing then which we have to learn is to *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ* ; for it is by means of this alone that we can *be saved*.<sup>64</sup> This is the only way of reconciliation with God, and being at peace with Him. This will bring with it real joy and gladness of heart. And hereby we shall be enabled to *abound in hope* with regard to futurity ; that whenever we shall leave this world, whenever this mortal life shall come to an end, which will be the case with us all, after a few short years have rolled over our heads, and we none of us know how soon the time will arrive for the close of our earthly career, then our joy will be complete and full in the beatific vision of the glory of God. Let it be our earnest prayer to the God of all grace, that we may be taught the truth as it is in Jesus, not only by the word, but also by the Spirit of God, *through the power of the Holy Ghost* influencing our hearts to receive the truth in the love of it ; that we may have that learning which will be the means of bringing us to everlasting salvation ; notwithstanding it may be of little estimation in this world, and may even expose us to reproach

<sup>64</sup> Acts. xvi. 31.

<sup>65</sup> 2 Thess. i. 8.

<sup>66</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 15.

and contempt among those who *know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>65</sup>

It will be found eventually that those only are truly wise who are thus learned in the holy scriptures, and made *wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus.*<sup>66</sup> But the text informs us,

*Secondly,* That the scriptures were written with the view of leading us to the exercise of *patience*, or submission to the will of God. *Patience* is usually spoken of in connection with affliction. The apostle said to the believing Hebrews, *Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*<sup>67</sup> Their having *done the will of God* is described before as having *endured a great fight of afflictions,*<sup>67</sup> by the reproaches and distresses to which they had been subjected, in consequence of their Christian profession. To this our Lord Jesus Christ was Himself exposed, as it is observed in the verse before the text; and His believing people may therefore be content to follow Him, *bearing His reproach.*<sup>68</sup> St. James produces other examples, when he exhorts Christians, *Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience;* and reminds them, *Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.*<sup>69</sup> He who knows

<sup>67</sup> Heb. x. 36, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Heb. xiii. 13.

<sup>69</sup> James v. 10, 11.



our *need of patience* is pleased to call Himself *the God of patience*, in order to lead us to seek the blessing at His hands. When we consider our natural impatience, we might well fear that if it depended upon ourselves we should be ready to sink under affliction, when we are oppressed by it. But it will ever be found that they who *wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength*,<sup>70</sup> and be enabled to *run with patience the race that is set before them, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*.<sup>71</sup> The promises of the word of God were written for the encouragement of His afflicted people, that they might plead them before Him, and find Him faithful to fulfil His word, on which He hath caused them to hope.

*Thirdly*, The holy scriptures were written for the *comfort* of the children of God. And oh! what *good words and comfortable words* do they contain. He who inspired them is *the God of consolation, the God of all comfort*.<sup>72</sup> What comfort is to be derived from the revelation given in His holy word respecting the way in which forgiveness of sins is bestowed, and the penitent sinner is reconciled to God. What comfort from the testimony contained in it that *God is love*; and that *He manifested His love to sinful man by sending His only-begotten Son into the world, to be the propitiation for our sins, that we might live through Him*.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Isai. xl. 31. <sup>71</sup> Heb. xii. 1, 2. <sup>72</sup> 2 Cor. i. 3. <sup>73</sup> John iv. 8—10.

To promote the comfort of His believing people was the object also of the institution of the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper; in which they call to mind the exceeding great love of Christ, in humbling Himself to become *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,*<sup>74</sup> for us men and for our salvation. May we take comfort from "feeding on Christ Jesus in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving," whenever we participate in this holy ordinance. May we behold Him by faith as *wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and having poured out His soul unto death,*<sup>75</sup> as our substitute; that we might derive healing from His wounds and life from His death. May we thus be strengthened and refreshed in our souls; and go on our way rejoicing in His holy name.

The *comfort of the scriptures* is found most especially in the season of affliction. It is then that every other refuge fails, and the word of God is found to be *an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast,*<sup>76</sup> which enables it to bear up under the storms of life, and leads it to look forward to the haven of eternal rest, which it sets before us through Christ Jesus our Saviour. *The exceeding great and precious promises*<sup>77</sup> of the word of God were given in order to afford *strong consolation* to them *who have fled for refuge to lay*

<sup>74</sup> Phil. ii. 8. <sup>75</sup> Is. liii. 5, 12. <sup>76</sup> Heb. vi. 19, 18. <sup>77</sup> 2 Pet. i. 4.



*hold of the hope set before us*<sup>76</sup> in the gospel of Christ. May we embrace them, and ever hold them fast; that we may enjoy the comfort of them, and partake of the salvation which they hold out to us.

But the holy scriptures were written also,

*Lastly, that we might have hope.* He from whom this blessing is to be obtained is styled likewise *the God of hope*; and He enables believers in Christ to *abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost*. They have a *hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*:<sup>78</sup> a *hope that maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them*.<sup>79</sup> He who *hath loved them, hath given them everlasting consolation and good hope through grace*,<sup>80</sup> a hope beyond the grave, which they would not part with in exchange for all that the world can give; a hope which fills them with joy and peace in believing: for relying upon the sure word of God, it is their privilege to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*,<sup>81</sup> as their unfailing portion through Christ, when they have done with all things here below. Let us cultivate this *hope of eternal life*<sup>78</sup> through our Lord Jesus Christ; and with the apostle beseech *the God of hope to fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost*.

<sup>78</sup> Titus i. 2.   <sup>79</sup> Rom. v. 5.   <sup>80</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 16.   <sup>81</sup> Rom. v. 5.

As the holy scriptures were written for the great and beneficial purposes which have been mentioned, it becomes us to seek to derive these advantages from them. Let us then *search the scriptures*<sup>82</sup> for the purpose of receiving the Divine instruction which they communicate; that we may be made *wise unto salvation*, through the knowledge of the revelation of God. From the examples which it sets before us, let us learn to endure with patience the reproaches of the world, and the afflictions of this life. Let us seek to enjoy the consolations which the God of all grace vouchsafes to them that believe His word, in the midst of all the causes of sorrow which may be presented to us; and having our faith and hope in Him, let us not doubt but that *He who hath begun the good work of His grace in our hearts will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*,<sup>83</sup> when *an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour*,<sup>84</sup> to praise and bless His name, and rejoice in His salvation for evermore.

<sup>82</sup> John v. 39.

<sup>83</sup> Phil. i. 6.

<sup>84</sup> 2 Pet. i. 11.

## SERMON III.

FOR

### THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

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I Corinthians iv. 1.

LET A MAN SO ACCOUNT OF US AS OF THE  
MINISTERS OF CHRIST, AND STEWARDS OF  
THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.

IN the Collect for this day the ministry of John the Baptist is held forth as an example for the ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. As St. John prepared the way of the Lord Jesus, at His first coming into the world, by stirring up the people to be ready to receive Him; so the ministers of Christ are to direct the attention of the people committed to their charge to His second coming; that they may be prepared to meet Him "when He shall appear again with power and great glory." How the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned in another Collect. It was "by preaching repentance," by "constantly" or undauntedly "speaking the truth," and by "boldly

rebuking vice," notwithstanding for this conduct he was called "patiently to suffer for the truth's sake." It is hard for flesh and blood to *do well and suffer for it, and take it patiently*. Divine grace is needful to enable us to submit to this. But the apostle Peter says, *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.*<sup>85</sup> And He Himself said to them that followed Him, *The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord; it is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?*<sup>86</sup> Believers in Christ must expect to meet with the same kind of treatment from the world as their Lord and Master received.

St. John the Baptist preached the most solemn and awful truths. *When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. And boast not of your outward privileges, for now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees, ready to be made use of; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the*

<sup>85</sup> 1 Peter ii. 20, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Matt. x. 24, 25.

*fire.*<sup>87</sup> But he also exhorted the people to *behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,*<sup>88</sup> that by believing in Him they might obtain pardon and salvation. In these two leading points of Divine truth, *warning* men of their danger as transgressors of the holy law of God, and *teaching*<sup>89</sup> them the way of reconciliation with God, *it is required in the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, that every man be found faithful.*

The Epistle for this day seems to be an appeal made by the apostle Paul from the judgment of man to that of the great day of God. He appears to have been accused, by some persons who fomented divisions in the church at Corinth, of a want of faithfulness in the discharge of his office. He therefore commences with explaining the nature of his office, and insists upon the necessity of its being executed with fidelity. He says, *It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.* Having declared this, he replies to his accusers, *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self.* To be judged or condemned by the opposers of the gospel of Christ was a matter of very little concern to him, since he was acquitted by his own conscience, which did not condemn him of un-

<sup>87</sup> Matt. iii. 7, 8, 10.

<sup>88</sup> John i. 29.

<sup>89</sup> Col. i. 28.

faithfulness in the exercise of his ministerial duties ; for on the contrary he could declare to his hearers, *I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but testified both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ; wherefore I take you to record, that I am pure from the blood of all men ; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God, or to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*<sup>90</sup> Such being the appeal which he could make before God and man, he might well say, *I know nothing by myself ; or, I am not conscious of having acted unfaithfully. At the same time he adds, yet am I not hereby justified.* For such is the deceitfulness of the human heart that we are prone to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.<sup>91</sup> And therefore not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.<sup>92</sup> To Him the apostle appeals, *He that judgeth me is the Lord.* And he exhorts those whom he addressed, *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts ; and then shall every man have praise of God.* They were not lightly to condemn the ministers of Christ, but to be assured that in the day when God shall judge the

<sup>90</sup> Acts xx. 20, 21, 26, 27.   <sup>91</sup> Rom xii. 3.   <sup>92</sup> 2 Cor. x. 18.



*secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel,*<sup>93</sup> His faithful servants shall be owned and commended, and blessed by their Lord and Master. Happy are they who can, in the midst of opposition and reproach, if they are called to meet it, appeal to the Searcher of hearts, and have a consciousness in their own minds that, while they feel their utter insufficiency of themselves for the office committed to them, their great anxiety is *not to corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God to speak in Christ;*<sup>94</sup> for to them it shall one day be said, *Thou hast been faithful over a few things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*<sup>95</sup> This will be to them a full recompence for all that they may be called to endure for His name's sake, on account of their fidelity in His service.

Let us now consider more particularly,

*First,* The nature of the ministerial office, as it is described in the text. And,

*Secondly,* The design of the apostle's exhortation.

May the Spirit of God seal instruction upon our minds, that we may profit by what He has recorded in His holy word for this purpose.

*First,* The nature of the office of the ministry of the gospel may be ascertained from the titles given to the persons who sustain it. They are

<sup>93</sup> Rom. ii. 16.

<sup>94</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Matt. xxv. 21.



called, *first, ministers of Christ*. A minister is only another word for a servant. A servant is one whose duty it is to obey the commands and to promote the interests of another, who is usually termed his master. The servants of Christ are under obligation to obey His command; which, to His ministers, who have a charge committed them, as the word here used denotes, is to *preach the gospel; to teach, and baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; to teach men to observe all things whatsoever their Lord and Master has commanded.*<sup>96</sup> It was as His servants in this respect, that the apostles *served the Lord Christ*. They thus obeyed His commands, that they might *please Him well in all things*. And as it was His object in coming into the world that sinners *through Him might be saved*, by the knowledge of His gospel; the promotion of this object was that which they continually kept in view. The language of the apostles was, *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*<sup>97</sup> At the same time the apostle Paul declared, *I endure all things for the elects' sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*<sup>98</sup> Thus he acted as a servant of Christ; and while he proposed his own example for the imitation of Timothy,

<sup>96</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.      <sup>97</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 5.      <sup>98</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 10.

his son in the faith, exhorted him, *Study to show thyself approved of God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*<sup>99</sup> But while the apostles of Christ fulfilled His commands, they were deeply sensible of their entire dependence upon His grace for the success of their ministry. As He had graciously declared to them for their encouragement, *Lo, I am with you alway*, they looked to Him to *work with them*, and to give *testimony to the word of His grace*, that it might be effectual for the accomplishment of His will. And they besought their hearers also to pray for them, *that utterance might be given unto them, to make known the mystery of the gospel, that therein they might speak boldly as they ought to speak.*<sup>100</sup> While then, brethren, you account us as the servants of Christ, to whom a charge is committed, to minister to you the word of life; pray for us that we may deliver His message faithfully, and that it may be made effectual to your salvation by His grace. Look above the servants to the Master, and wait upon Him for His blessing in the use of the means which He has appointed for your edification, and admonition, and consolation. Pray that by faithfully executing our commission we may *save ourselves and them that hear us.*<sup>1</sup>

The ministers of Christ are called in the text,

<sup>99</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 15    <sup>100</sup> Eph. vi. 19, 20.    <sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 16.

*Secondly, Stewards of the mysteries of God.* A steward is one who distributes to his master's household what is entrusted to him for that purpose. So our Lord explains the term, when He asks, *Who is that faithful and wise steward whom his Lord shall make ruler over His household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?*<sup>2</sup> In this character the apostle Peter addresses *the ministers of Christ.* *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*<sup>3</sup> The oracles of God are the treasury from whence the *stewards of the mysteries of God* are to dispense the word of truth, of life and salvation, to His waiting people; to the family and household of faith. It is, therefore, specially incumbent upon the *ministers of Christ* to be well acquainted with the holy scriptures; without which it is impossible for them rightly to dispense *the mysteries of God.*

What these mysteries are the apostle declared, when he said in this epistle, *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified;*<sup>4</sup> respecting which he adds,

<sup>2</sup> Luke xii. 42.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter iv. 10, 11.

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

*We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him; but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God.*<sup>5</sup> These things he asserts *the natural or animal man*, he who is led by his senses, who is *sensual, not having the Spirit*,<sup>6</sup> will not receive; but the spiritual man, who is taught by the Holy Ghost, will receive them, and be able to judge respecting them. In the conclusion of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle speaks in similar language, *Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith; To God, only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ, for ever. Amen.*<sup>7</sup> The mysteries of God then are the doctrines of the gospel of Christ, the things which relate to the

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 7—10.

<sup>6</sup> Jude 19.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. xvi. 25—27.

redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. These mysteries the stewards of God are to dispense to their fellow-creatures, to open, explain, or make them known, that those who hear the word of God may believe and be saved.

The present state and condition of mankind may be called a great mystery. That the whole human race should be living in alienation from God their Creator and Benefactor, not desiring the knowledge of His ways, not loving Him, nor living to His glory. This is a fact, but it is undoubtedly a great mystery. It is evident enough that *all flesh have corrupted their way upon the earth*. The ravages which sin has made are but too obvious. The word of God informs us how it is that sin abounds so much in the world. It tells us that *by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*:<sup>8</sup> that *the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same to it: and therefore the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together*.<sup>9</sup> It says, that we were *shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin*;<sup>10</sup> and that sorrow and pain, disease and death, are the consequences of sin. It is the revelation of God alone which traces sin and death to their source, shows their

<sup>8</sup> Rom. v. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. viii. 20, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm li. 5.

true nature and their connexion with each other as cause and effect. Death follows in the train of sin. *The soul that sinneth it shall die. The wages of sin is death.*

But the mystery of redeeming love is that which the Bible unfolds most especially. The love of God to man, to fallen, sinful man, is the theme on which it dwells with delight. It tells us how He passed by the fallen angels, and left them *reserved in everlasting chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day;*<sup>11</sup> and yet looked with compassion upon fallen man, and formed a plan for his deliverance from that wrath and destruction to which his sin had justly exposed him. It declares that *God is love*; and that, *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.*<sup>12</sup> It shows the completeness and freeness of the salvation of Christ. It invites, *Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*<sup>13</sup> It announces, that *this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,*<sup>14</sup> and that He receiveth graciously all who truly turn to Him, and will not cast out any that

<sup>11</sup> Jude 6.

<sup>12</sup> 1 John iv. 8—10.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. xxii. 17.



do come to Him with a real and earnest desire to partake of the spiritual and heavenly blessings which He came upon earth to procure for and bestow upon the sinful children of men. This is a mystery indeed: how the God of infinite holiness and justice can receive into His favour sinners who were exposed to His wrath; in such a way that there should be no jarring between His attributes of justice and mercy, which still display infinite perfection; that He can be both *a just God and a Saviour*.<sup>15</sup>

These mysteries, and others connected with them in the holy scriptures, *the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*, unfold and explain to their fellow-sinners. They proclaim the wonders of their Saviour's incarnation, which the Christian church calls to mind especially at this season; the *great mystery of godliness*, that *God was manifest in the flesh*.<sup>16</sup> They make known the bitter sufferings and death which He endured as the substitute for guilty sinners, that He might be *the propitiation for our sins*: His resurrection, whereby was declared the acquittal of those whom He came to redeem; His ascension into heaven, whereby He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; His outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, to qualify His apostles for the work

14 1 Tim. i. 15.

15 Isaiah xlv. 21.

16 1 Tim. iii. 16.

of the ministry, and to enable those who heard the word of God to receive the truth in the love of it; and His ever living *to make intercession for them that come unto God by Him*, as their Mediator and Advocate. These mysteries were hidden from the world before the coming of Christ. The nations of the earth were sunk in ignorance and sin, and felt that an awful uncertainty hung over all things beyond the grave. What reason have we to bless God that we live in a time in which these mysteries are revealed, when the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shines around, and marks out as with a sunbeam the way to God and heaven. May we, *while we have the light, believe in the light, that we may be the children of light.*<sup>17</sup> May it be given to us *to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God,*<sup>18</sup> that we may be blessed by Him both in time and in eternity. We are to consider,

*Secondly*, The design of the apostle's exhortation, *Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* It is as much as to say, Consider those who minister to you in holy things, as *servants* charged to deliver to you a most important message from their and your Lord and Master; and as *stewards* appointed to distribute to each of the household of God a portion from the word of God which is entrusted

<sup>17</sup> John xii. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Luke viii. 10.

to them. Let your attention be taken off from the men to their message. Let it be your anxiety to obtain the blessing derived from knowing *the mysteries of the kingdom of God*. A day is coming when *the Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart*; and then they only will be blessed who have *with the heart believed unto righteousness*.<sup>19</sup> As the servants and *ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God*.<sup>20</sup> *We beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*.<sup>21</sup> Do not reject the message of the gospel which we deliver to you, but give it the consideration which is due to a message of such unspeakable importance. The Lord Jesus Christ sends it to you; He who *came into the world to save sinners*; He who laid aside His *glory, which He had with the Father before the world was*, and appeared as a Man among men, "for us men and for our salvation;" He who *was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and poured out His soul unto death* as a sacrifice for sin; He calls upon you by us, His ministers, to repent and believe the gospel, that you may not perish, but have everlasting life. Overlook the insignificant messenger, and lay to heart the message which he is commissioned to deliver to

<sup>19</sup> Rom. x. 10.

<sup>20</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 1.

you. *See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh to you from heaven.*<sup>22</sup> He is present while His gospel is preached, for He said to His disciples, *Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*<sup>23</sup> He knows whether His word be received, or disregarded. And as He declared to some when He was on earth, so it still remains true with regard to those who hear it, *The word that I have spoken the same shall judge you in the last day.*<sup>24</sup> He will come again to *judge the world in righteousness.* *The Lord will come, and will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts of all men.* Then blessed will they be who have received the message of the gospel, and awful will be the condition of those who have rejected it.

Let us ask ourselves then, What do we think of these things? What are the thoughts of our hearts upon the subject? Whatever they are, we are told that *God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*<sup>25</sup> May it be our happiness then to have praise of God, as those who have received the message of the gospel which is delivered by the servants of Christ. May we all have wise and understanding hearts given us to *know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.* The gospel of Christ is *the one thing needful* to be

<sup>22</sup> Heb. xii. 25. <sup>23</sup> Mat. xxviii. 20. <sup>24</sup> John xii. 48. <sup>25</sup> Eccl. xii. 14.

known. For of nothing else can it be truly declared, *He that believeth it shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned;*<sup>26</sup> yea, *he that believeth not is condemned already,*<sup>27</sup> he is under condemnation, and is only awaiting the time when the sentence will be put in execution, as soon as this mortal life shall come to a close. *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*<sup>28</sup> As death leaves us, judgment will find us. There is no repentance in the grave. Are we then ready to die? Are we prepared to meet our God? We know not how soon we may be called hence. *There is but a step between us and death.* Let us then seek above all things to be prepared for death and for judgment, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and being made partakers of His Holy Spirit. Let it be your earnest prayer, brethren, that the word of God may take deep root in your hearts, and that it may spring up, through His blessing, and bring forth fruit in your lives to His glory; that it may be manifest that the exhortations and instructions of the ministers of Christ are *received, not as the word of men, but as they are in truth the word of God*; that your faith does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, *which worketh effectually in them that believe,*<sup>29</sup> to His glory and their salvation.

<sup>26</sup> Mark xv. 16. <sup>27</sup> John iii. 18. <sup>28</sup> Heb. ix. 27. <sup>29</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 13.

## SERMON IV.

FOR

### THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

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THE OMNIPRESENCE OF THE LORD.

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Philippians iv. 5.

THE LORD IS AT HAND.

THE Epistle for this day seems to have been selected on account of its containing these words. They apply both to what goes before them, and to what follows in it. If they should be considered to mean, according to the language of St. James, *The coming of the Lord draweth nigh*, it becomes believers in Christ to rejoice in the prospect of it. Since they are then commanded to *look up, and lift up their heads*, because their *redemption draweth nigh*.<sup>29</sup> If they be applied to the celebration of the approaching festival, in which we commemorate the first coming of our most adorable Redeemer, it is the privilege of Christians to rejoice that unto us was born *a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord*. And if they be supposed to intimate merely,



according to the declaration of the Psalmist, that *the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth,*<sup>30</sup> His praying people may well rejoice in this consideration; and take encouragement from it to commit themselves and all their concerns to the care and disposal of His overruling providence, which ordereth all things in heaven and earth.

Let us then enter upon the consideration of the Epistle for this day with prayer that the Spirit of God would be pleased to apply to our hearts the exhortations which are here addressed to us, that our joy may be in the Lord our Saviour, and we may cultivate that communion and fellowship with our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus which is here inculcated, so as to enjoy the peace of God in our consciences, and His love in our hearts, to our consolation, and to the glory of His holy name.

The Epistle commences with the exhortation, *Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again, I say, rejoice.* This is a disposition of mind peculiarly suited to the season in which we commemorate the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The event occasioned joy in heaven, when *a multitude of the heavenly host sang in joyful concert, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men;*<sup>31</sup> and therefore the commemoration

<sup>29</sup> Luke xxi. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Psalm cxlv. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Luke i. 14.

of it may well be a cause of rejoicing to those whom God came to redeem. But it is the privilege of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are interested by faith in His great salvation, to *rejoice in the Lord always*. They have great reason to rejoice in their Lord and Saviour; to rejoice because *He came into the world to save sinners*; and that by His obedience to the law of God, and His sufferings and death in human nature, He accomplished all that was requisite for the reconciliation of sinful man to the God of infinite justice and holiness. The joy of the true Christian is not the joy of self-complacency, which is in general the cause of rejoicing with the people of the world; but the joy of gratitude for mercies received from *the God of all grace*. We are called upon to keep Christmas, because of the blessings which flow to us from the incarnation of our Divine Redeemer. These unspeakable blessings we ought to call to mind with gratitude of heart, and expressions of joy at all times. This the apostle insists upon by repeating the exhortation, *And again I say, Rejoice*. The repetition implies that the persons addressed needed encouragement. They were in a state of affliction. The apostle had before said to them, *Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*<sup>32</sup> He therefore showed them that it was their privilege to

*rejoice, inasmuch as they were partakers of Christ's sufferings, since, when His glory should be revealed, they should be glad also with exceeding joy.*<sup>33</sup> So the prophet Isaiah declared, *The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.*<sup>34</sup> The meek, the humbled, the self-abased before God, those who are lowly in their own eyes, the poor in spirit, the contrite in heart, are the persons who need to be encouraged to rejoice; and they have also abundant reason to comply with the command, for it is their privilege to look forward to the time when their *sorrow shall be turned into joy* indeed, when, as our Saviour said to His disciples, *I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.*<sup>35</sup> It becomes them therefore to *rejoice in the Lord always*, in the prospect of what He has promised to do for them, as well as on account of what He has done on their behalf. But the joy of the Christian is not a noisy boisterous joy like that of the worldling. It is a calm and silent joy, a *joy which a stranger doth not intermeddle with.*<sup>36</sup> It is not like *the laughter of a fool, which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot,*<sup>37</sup> that makes a great noise for a time and then goes out in darkness. It is *everlasting joy*, as well as *joy un-*

<sup>32</sup> Phil. i. 29. <sup>33</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 13. <sup>34</sup> Isai. xxix. 19. <sup>35</sup> John xvi. 22.

*speakable and full of glory.*<sup>38</sup> And it is perhaps intended to be intimated by the next exhortation, that it is a joy accompanied with *moderation* or gentleness, as the word is rendered in other places, a joy mingled with serenity and peace.

The apostle proceeds to say, *Let your moderation be known unto all men.* Be meek and mild, gentle and patient, forbearing and forgiving in your conduct towards others, as well as moderate and temperate in your pursuit of the things of this life. What honour would be put upon Christianity were all who bear its name affable and kind in their intercourse with each other, as it was said of old by the heathen, "See how these Christians love one another." But what a different aspect does religion assume, when selfishness and unkindness usurp the place of these Christian virtues; and when those who talk a great deal about religion, and frequent the ordinances of the house of God, are as eager in the pursuit of the things of life as others who are looking to the world as their only portion.

The apostle enforces his exhortation to joy and moderation by a powerful incentive to obedience. *The Lord is at hand.* This declaration applies, as has been observed, both to what goes before, and to what follows. The Lord Jesus is near you, is *with His people always*,<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Prov. xvi. 10. <sup>37</sup> Eccl. vii. 6. <sup>38</sup> 1 Peter i. 8. <sup>39</sup> Matt. xxviii. 20.

according to His promise, therefore rejoice in Him, therefore show meekness and moderation in all your conduct ; and therefore dismiss all your care and anxiety, and make Him your refuge at all times, and *pour out your hearts before Him*.<sup>40</sup> The Lord is ever near to His people. Let them remember it for their admonition, encouragement, and consolation.

But if the declaration be regarded as referring to the second coming of Christ, or that which is to us of the same import, as having the same consequences to each individual, the nearness of death and judgment ; it announces to us the importance of living as it becometh those to do who must soon be separated from all things here below. *We know not the day of our death*,<sup>41</sup> we know not how soon we may be called to appear in the presence of the Lord ; let us then seek to please Him in all our conduct ; let us *abide in Him, that when He shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*.<sup>42</sup> Let us rejoice in Him as *all our salvation, and all our desire*,<sup>43</sup> and not eagerly pursue earthly joys ; and then it will be no loss to be separated from them. Let moderation appear in all our conduct with respect to the things of this life.

But, further, it is to be observed, that *the Lord*

<sup>40</sup> Ps. lxxii. 8. <sup>41</sup> Gen. xxvii. 2. <sup>42</sup> 1 John ii. 28. <sup>43</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

*is at hand* as the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. For the apostle proceeds on this account to exhort Christians, *Be careful for nothing*. Do not give way to distressing anxiety about the things of this world ; for *the Lord is at hand* to take care of His people that put their trust in Him. Against this carefulness, or anxious solicitude, there are many cautions given in the New Testament, both by our Saviour and His apostles. Martha was reprovèd by Him, for being *careful and troubled*, or anxious and disturbed, *about many things*.<sup>44</sup> In His sermon on the mount He admonishes His disciples, *Take no thought*, or be not anxious, *saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things: but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought, be not anxious for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself, or bring its own cares with it. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*.<sup>45</sup> St. Paul says to the Corinthians, *I would have you without carefulness*,<sup>46</sup> or worldly anxiety. And St. Peter exhorts, *Cast all your care upon God, for He careth for you*.<sup>47</sup> So dangerous is this disposition that in

<sup>44</sup> Luke x. 41. <sup>45</sup> Matt. vi. 31—34. <sup>46</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 32.



the parable of the sower our blessed Lord speaks of *the care of this world* as choking *the word*, so that it *becometh unfruitful*.<sup>48</sup> Many persons are liable to be disturbed and anxious about the things of this life in various respects. There is nothing so well adapted to remove this anxiety from the mind as the consideration that *the Lord is at hand*, who is able to order all things in providence and in grace for His people that call upon Him, and has promised to supply all their need; so that *they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing*.<sup>49</sup>

For this reason a direction is given respecting the means to be used in order to obtain His *help in time of need*. The apostle advises the children of God, *In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God*. Here is an effectual remedy for all the evils with which we can possibly be visited. And in making use of this remedy, it may be said, *According to your faith it shall be done unto you*. It is a great relief in trouble of any kind to pour out the heart before the Lord. So the Psalmist found it; and therefore said, *When I am in heaviness I will think upon God, when my heart is vexed I will complain*<sup>50</sup> to Him; *for He shall stand at the right hand of the poor to save him from those that condemn his soul*.<sup>51</sup> And again, *I*

<sup>47</sup> 1 Pet. v. 7. <sup>48</sup> Matt. xiii. 22. <sup>49</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 10. <sup>50</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 3.

*poured out my complaint before Him ; I showed Him of my trouble.*<sup>52</sup> When all other help failed he could say, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*<sup>53</sup>

This however is a source of relief from anxiety which is to be obtained only by the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, for until He is believed on *with the heart unto righteousness*, there is no access into the Divine presence ; since *God heareth not sinners*. Sin cuts off mankind from communion with God. Our Saviour Himself declared, *I am the way, the truth, and the life ; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.*<sup>54</sup> Unless we plead His merits for our acceptance at the throne of grace, we cannot be admitted to an audience there. But to all who draw nigh to God in the all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ, our Mediator and *Advocate with the Father, the Lord is at hand* to listen to their humble supplications. They may therefore dismiss their cares and anxieties, and *cast their burden on the Lord*, believing that *He will sustain* them, and give them that relief which they need.

What a gracious direction is this which is given to the believer in Jesus. *In every thing ;* whatever causes anxiety and distress is to be carried to God, and cast at His footstool. All anxiety of every kind is to be removed in this way. *By*

<sup>51</sup> Ps. cix. 31.    <sup>52</sup> Ps. cxlii. 2.    <sup>53</sup> Ps. xlvi. 1.    <sup>54</sup> John xiv. 6.

*prayer*, or humbly complaining to God, and making known to Him all the desire of our souls. *By supplication*, or earnest entreaty for the fulfilment of His gracious promises. *With thanksgiving*; giving thanks at the same time for every blessing which His bountiful hand has bestowed, and every mercy which He continues to vouchsafe to His undeserving creatures; doing *all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.*<sup>55</sup> This is the way in which the children of God are commanded to act, that hereby every distressing care may be removed, and every needful blessing obtained. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*<sup>56</sup> God *will be enquired of*<sup>57</sup> in order that He may do as He has promised, and the thanksgiving of a grateful heart is to be offered to Him for the blessings which are received in answer to prayer.

If our sorrows lead us to the throne of grace to cast all our care upon God, to *pour out our hearts before Him*, to make Him our *refuge*, they will prove blessings in disguise. *In every thing*, whatever pains the mind, whatever occasions distressing feelings or apprehensions, it is the privilege of the Christian to make *known his requests unto God*; to ask for the relief of his wants, the supply of all his necessities; to open all his

55 Col. iii. 17.

56 James v. 16.

57 Ezekiel xxxvi. 37.

mind, to unburden all his thoughts and desires before His heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, believing that He will not despise the prayer of His people who call upon Him, but will do for them *exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think,*<sup>58</sup> *will supply all their need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*<sup>59</sup> And in the end it will ever be found that the prayer of faith is not offered up in vain, because *He is faithful who hath promised to fulfil the desire of them that fear Him, to hear their cry and to save them.*<sup>60</sup> And therefore the praying people of God will have cause to praise Him, as the Hearer and Answerer of their humble supplications.

The act of giving thanks for mercies received excites feelings of gratitude in the breast, and encourages hope that He who has been so gracious as to bestow the blessing for which thanks are rendered to Him, will not withhold what is further needed, if it be for His glory and for our good that it should be granted. So the apostle argued, while he gave thanks to God, *who, said he, delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver ; in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.*<sup>61</sup> The more thankful we are to the God of our mercies, the more reason we shall have to praise Him for the continuance of His benefits. While therefore the apostle exhorted the church

<sup>58</sup> Eph. iii. 20. <sup>59</sup> Phil. iv. 20. <sup>60</sup> Psalm cxlv. 19. <sup>61</sup> 2 Cor. i. 10.

of the Thessalonians to *pray without ceasing*, he directed them also, *In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* Thus he knew they would have reason to *rejoice evermore*.<sup>62</sup> The Psalmist therefore declared, *It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O most high*.<sup>63</sup> He who does not give thanks to God for the blessings which he enjoys, and especially when those things which he has prayed for have been granted to him, shows himself to be insensible of the goodness of God, and ungrateful for the gifts of His bounty. Let us unite our fervent thanksgivings for the blessings we have received, with our humble supplications and prayers for the things which we need; that by the offering of praise we may glorify Him, who condescends to accept the thanksgivings of His waiting people. *Let us, by Jesus Christ, offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*.<sup>64</sup> And let us *in every thing* seek His blessing, lay before Him all our concerns, and commit our way to Him, being persuaded that *the Lord is at hand*, to hear and answer us, and to give us *grace to help in time of our need*.<sup>65</sup>

For our encouragement in the exercise of *prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*, we are

<sup>62</sup> 1 Thess. v. 16—18. <sup>63</sup> Ps. xcii. 1. <sup>64</sup> Heb. xiii. 15. <sup>65</sup> Heb. iv. 16.

assured that we shall derive from it the greatest consolation and happiness. For the apostle adds, *The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* How blessed must they be who really enjoy this peace of God! They are at *peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord*, in consequence of *being justified by faith*<sup>66</sup> in their Redeemer, and they have peace from God in their consciences. The believer in Christ can never think of *peace with God* without connecting with it the means whereby this great blessing was procured, as it is described by the prophet, *The chastisement of our peace was upon Him,*<sup>67</sup> *who suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,*<sup>68</sup> *and with His stripes we are healed.*<sup>67</sup> There is no peace with God, but through faith in the atonement of Christ. *He is our peace,*<sup>69</sup> *who made peace by the blood of His cross.*<sup>70</sup> On this we must rely, if we would regard the God of heaven as being at peace with us. We are *reconciled to God by the death of His Son,*<sup>71</sup> *who put away our sin by the sacrifice of Himself* in our stead. It is the consideration of the price of our redemption, which discovers to us its value; and shows us the evil of sin, which could not be expiated without the blood-shedding and death of our

<sup>66</sup> Rom. v. 1.    <sup>67</sup> Is. liii. 5.    <sup>68</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 18.    Eph. ii. 14.



Surety. *Without shedding of blood is no remission*<sup>72</sup> of sin. That therefore which could not be pardoned without such a ransom, must be most hateful to God, and most hurtful to man. It is this view of sin, as having caused the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, which alone will make us *utterly to detest it, and utterly to abhor it*, because *it is a cursed thing*,<sup>73</sup> with which God cannot be reconciled, but must visit it with His wrath and indignation.

But the *peace* spoken of in the words before us, is peace from God communicated to the soul by the influence of the Holy Ghost, in the use of the means of grace ; a sense of peace in the conscience, enjoyed by the believer in Christ, in consequence of reposing the concerns of his soul and body, or all his care, upon God, by *prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* ; happiness of heart in a persuasion of the love of God in Christ, and the friendship of an almighty Protector. This *peace of God passeth all understanding*, the blessedness of it cannot be conceived of by any but those who through Divine grace are made acquainted with it. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him ; but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.*<sup>74</sup> The Psalmist says, *Great peace*

70 Col. i. 2. 71 Rom. v. 10. 72 Heb. ix. 22. 73 Deut. vii. 26.

*have they which love Thy law.*<sup>75</sup> It is such peace as the world cannot give; and which it cannot take away from those who are made partakers of it through Divine grace.

The apostle adds respecting this peace of God, it *shall keep your hearts and minds*. The word *keep* denotes the powerful protection and security which is afforded by a garrison that is in possession of a strong hold. Thus *the peace of God* keeps the *heart*, or preserves the affections, in the love and service of God; so that He is loved above all things, and His service is found to be perfect freedom. It also keeps the *mind* or understanding, so that it is attracted to Him as its centre, in the contemplation of whom is found happiness and delight. By the enjoyment of this peace with God and from God, in communion and fellowship with Him, the believer is kept from falling under the power of his spiritual enemies; his affections and his understanding are set upon their right object; and *the joy of the Lord is his strength.*<sup>76</sup> This unspeakable blessing is said to be received *through Christ Jesus*, through His mediation and intercession, or through faith in His atonement. It is for the sake of His merits alone that any good gift of God is bestowed upon the sinful children of men. It is through faith in His name alone

<sup>74</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.    <sup>75</sup> Ps. cxix. 165.    <sup>76</sup> Neh. viii. 9.

that any of the fallen descendants of Adam can draw nigh to God to supplicate any blessing from His hands.

This *peace of God* is the greatest blessing that can be enjoyed on earth; it is to those who partake of it a foretaste of the happiness of heaven. And we are to remember that *the Lord is at hand*, ready to bestow it upon His waiting people, who *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make known their requests unto Him*. Let us then seek earnestly to have *the peace of God* in our consciences, by making Him our refuge at all times in the midst of all the changes and uncertainties of this mortal life; that He may keep us by His mighty *power through faith unto salvation*; and we may have a good hope that whenever we shall be called out of this world, we shall be admitted into His blissful presence, to rejoice in His salvation for evermore. As *the Lord is at hand*, let us live as in His presence, seeking His direction and blessing on all occasions, and dismissing all our anxieties and cares by casting them upon Him. Let us desire above all things to please Him in all our conduct. Let us *worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*; and look forward in faith to the fulfilment of His promises to His waiting people in eternity.

SERMON V.  
FOR  
CHRISTMAS DAY.

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THE DIVINITY AND INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

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Hebrews i. 6.

AND AGAIN, WHEN HE BRINGETH IN THE  
FIRST BEGOTTEN INTO THE WORLD, HE  
SAITH, AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD  
WORSHIP HIM.

ON this day we commemorate in an especial manner the rising of the Sun of righteousness on our benighted world, after *darkness* had *covered the earth, and gross darkness the people*, for several centuries. Four hundred years had elapsed, during which no inspired messenger of God had appeared to denounce His judgments, or to proclaim His mercy; and the knowledge of the true God was almost effaced from the earth. The Jews had set aside the word of God to follow their own traditions; and as for the other nations of the earth, although some of them were most eminent for intellectual wisdom, yet, notwithstanding all

their boasted endowments and acquirements, they *knew not God*. We have reason to bless God that our lot has been cast in a day when Christianity displays its blissful influence; and in a land where the true light of Divine revelation shines in its native splendour, not debased by absurd superstitions, nor corrupted by impious *traditions*, introduced in order to make *the word of God of none effect*.<sup>77</sup>

Our church takes the opportunity afforded by the celebration of the nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to set before her members some of those passages of holy writ, in which *His eternal power and Godhead* are more particularly stated. This doctrine appears especially in the Epistle and Gospel for this day; while on the Sunday after Christmas she directs us to those passages which speak chiefly of His human nature; thus teaching us that He was both God and man in one Christ. In the Epistle for this day the apostle produces the fullest proof of the Divinity of our ever-blessed Redeemer; showing that *God was manifest in the flesh*<sup>78</sup> for the salvation of sinners; that He *who is over all, God blessed for ever*, was made *in the likeness of sinful flesh*,<sup>79</sup> to be the Redeemer of fallen man, to deliver us sinners from going down into the pit of destruction, by becoming our ransom. Well may those who are

77 Matt. xv. 6. 78 1 Tim. iii. 18. 79 Rom. ix. 5, viii. 3.

interested in the blessings of the redemption of Christ celebrate the season of His birth into our world with joy and gladness of heart. May it be our happiness so to do. And may the Spirit of God vouchsafe His blessing to our consideration of the portion of His holy word, to which our attention is now to be directed.

The apostle begins this Epistle with stating that it was the same God who had inspired the prophets to write the scriptures of the Old Testament, who was the Author of the Christian dispensation. But that in this last age of the world, He had spoken to mankind, not by inferior agents, as formerly, but by His own coequal and coeternal Son, His only begotten. *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in timè past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.* This marks the superior excellency of the Christian dispensation to those which preceded it; as our Saviour said in one of His parables, *Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying, They will reverence My Son.*<sup>80</sup> This was giving the utmost possible proof of His kindness and love to man.

This wonderful exhibition of the love of God to His sinful rebellious creatures having been asserted, a description of the attributes and perfections of the Son of God follows. *Whom He*

<sup>80</sup> Matt. xxi. 37.



*hath appointed Heir of all things; by whom also He made the worlds.* In consequence of having become man in order to reconcile the world unto Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ was appointed in the counsels of the everlasting covenant *Heir of all things*; or, when His minority or season of humiliation should end, the Lord and Governor of that world which He Himself had made and came to redeem. To this His office our Saviour referred, when He addressed the Father of heaven respecting Himself, *Thou hast given Thy Son power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.*<sup>81</sup> It is therefore declared that *He is Lord of all.*<sup>82</sup>

The apostle proceeds to describe His glory and majesty, together with the object proposed by His great humiliation, and His subsequent exaltation. *Who, being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.* When the evangelist St. John related the incarnation of our Divine Redeemer, he said, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*<sup>83</sup> And He is styled by our apostle in another place, *The image of the*

<sup>81</sup> John xvii. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Acts x. 36.

<sup>83</sup> John i. 14.

*invisible God*,<sup>84</sup> so that *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God* was displayed in the face or person of *Jesus Christ*,<sup>85</sup> and He truly affirmed, *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father*.<sup>86</sup> As this glorious Being created the universe, so likewise He upholds it and preserves it in existence; *By Him all things consist*.<sup>84</sup> How wonderful was it that He, who was so highly exalted, should abase Himself so low, in consequence of His love to fallen man! In order that He might put away our sins, He condescended to lay aside that *glory which He had with the Father before the world was*,<sup>86</sup> and to take *the form of a servant*; and further *humbled Himself* to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; thus to bear our sins in His own body on the tree, that He might purge them away, or blot them out from the book of God's remembrance. It was for this purpose that He abased Himself to the lowest state of degradation to which a human being could be brought; He *endured* the pain and the ignominy, or *the shame of the cross*; He became accursed, was *made a curse for us*, that He might *redeem us from the curse of the law*, and avert the wrath of God from His rebellious creatures, by having it poured upon His own head, as though He had been Himself the guilty transgressor.

But although the Redeemer of mankind *poured*

<sup>84</sup> Col. i. 15, 17.    <sup>85</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.    <sup>86</sup> John xiv. 9, xvii. 5.

*out His soul unto death, when He was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors ;<sup>87</sup> yet His soul was not left in hell, the place of departed spirits, neither His flesh did see corruption, because it was not possible that He should be holden of death.<sup>88</sup> He died for our sins, but He rose and revived, or lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living ,<sup>89</sup> and in human nature He was seen ascending into heaven, to sit down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, as the Head over all things to His church,<sup>90</sup> the mighty Conqueror of death and hell, who for the suffering of death was crowned with glory and honour, and set at the right hand of God in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come,<sup>90</sup> being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For as the Heir of all things and Lord of all, He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto Him.<sup>91</sup>*

In order to show the vast superiority of the Son of God to all created beings, the apostle asks, *Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?*

<sup>87</sup> Isa. liii. 12. <sup>88</sup> Acts ii. 31, 24. <sup>89</sup> Rom. xiv. 9. <sup>90</sup> Eph. i. 21, 22.

*And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son? The angels that excel in strength<sup>92</sup> were never addressed as partakers of essential Deity, or as one in nature and essence with the Divine Being. They are so far inferior to the Son of God, that when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him. They adore Him as their Lord and King; they do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word; they are His ministers, or attendants, that wait upon Him and do His pleasure.<sup>92</sup>*

With regard to their office, *of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire. They are swift as the winds in executing His orders. They are ardent as a flame of fire in performing His will. They are His ministering spirits, ready to undertake any service in which He may be pleased to employ them. They are employed under His direction, but in what manner we know not, as this is not revealed to us, for the benefit of them who shall be heirs of salvation. They are merely the servants of God; not so the Son; for unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. The Son is on the throne, the eternal throne of heaven. He wields the sceptre of in-*

<sup>91</sup> 1 Peter iii. 22.

<sup>92</sup> Ps. ciii. 20, 21.

flexible justice, of infinitely perfect righteousness. Of Him it is added, *Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity ; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.* He loves righteousness supremely. In Him there is not the least deviation from infinite rectitude. He hates iniquity with inconceivable and unalterable abhorrence. This He constantly manifested, even when He was compassed with the sinless infirmities of human nature ; and therefore the Spirit was given to Him without measure, and He became Head over all things to His church, being thus qualified for the office which He was to sustain as the God-man, Christ Jesus.

The superiority of the Son is farther shown in His being addressed as the Creator of all things, who is God from everlasting to everlasting. *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands : they shall perish, but Thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as a garment ; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.* As He must be antecedent to all the works of His hands, the visible creation, so He will survive them all, the wreck of nature and the crash of worlds. When all these things shall be dissolved, He will continue the same, without end, as He was without beginning.

Such is the account which the apostle gives of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Epistle for this day. Let us now consider more particularly the words which have been selected for the text, as appropriate to the subject on which we are accustomed to dwell at this season, the incarnation of our Divine Redeemer. We may inquire

*First*, Into the meaning of the title here given to our blessed Saviour, *the first begotten* ;

*Secondly*, The purpose for which He came into the world ; and

*Thirdly*, The Divine proclamation concerning Him. This is indeed a subject for rejoicing to all believers in Christ. May we rejoice in commemorating His birth, in consequence of being made partakers for ourselves of the blessings which flow from it to the children of men.

The *first begotten* is a term used to denote priority both of existence and affection, meaning both the first born and the most beloved. It is applied to our Lord Jesus Christ as the *only begotten Son of God*,<sup>93</sup> the only person who ever appeared in the world, who could say of Himself with truth, *He that seen Me, hath seen the Father* ; for *I am in the Father and the Father in Me* ;<sup>94</sup> *I and my Father are one*.<sup>95</sup> No other being could ever speak of Himself as one in

<sup>93</sup> John iii. 18.    <sup>94</sup> John xiv. 9—11.    <sup>95</sup> John x. 30.



nature or essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Triune Jehovah. In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, the same word is introduced twice in the course of four verses, only it is there translated *the first born*. The whole passage will in some measure explain its import, for it is altogether a most exalted and magnificent description of the power and glory of our adorable Redeemer. He is called the *dear Son* of his Father, or in the marginal reading, *the Son of His love; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature; for by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist; and He is the Head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence; for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell*. We may here observe the importance which the apostle attached to this title of the *first begotten* or *first born*. He considered it to mean that the Person who was so denominated was the Creator, the Preserver, and the Governor of the world. St. John introduces this title in a similar connexion, when he speaks

of *Jesus Christ*, as *the faithful Witness*, and *the first begotten from the dead*, and *the Prince of the kings of the earth*.<sup>96</sup> It was adopted from the language of the Psalmist, where Christ is brought forward as saying, *I will declare the decree; the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession*.<sup>97</sup> And in another place God speaks concerning Him, *I will make Him My first born, higher than the kings of the earth*.<sup>97</sup> In both these passages His supreme authority and almighty power are described in connexion with this title. From all which we may conclude that our Lord Jesus Christ is called *the first begotten* or *first born* to denote His superiority to all created beings, notwithstanding He was a partaker of human nature.

The title of *Son of God* was also applied to Him as having been begotten of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary; the angel who informed her of the high honour which awaited her of being the mother of the Messiah, having said unto her, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that Holy Thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God*.<sup>98</sup> This

<sup>96</sup> Rev. i. 5.    <sup>97</sup> Psalm ii. 7, lxxxix. 27.    <sup>98</sup> Luke i. 35.

exalted Personage having been *born of a woman* in our world, the purpose for which He was brought into it is a subject worthy of our consideration. This is to be noticed in the

*Second* place, as it ought not to be overlooked when we celebrate the birth of our Redeemer. That should be a joyful event, and must be one of the greatest importance, the remembrance of which has been kept up for eighteen centuries since it took place. The consideration of the cause of the incarnation of Christ will show that the event was one which is really worthy of being kept in everlasting remembrance. The name which was Divinely appointed to be borne by this illustrious Personage, was designed to point out the object proposed by His coming upon earth, or His being brought into the world. The angel of the Lord, who appeared unto Joseph, commanded respecting Him, *Thou shalt call His name JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins;*<sup>99</sup> which was declared to be in fulfilment of the prophecy by Isaiah,<sup>1</sup> *Thou shalt call His name EMMANUEL, which being interpreted is, God with us.*<sup>99</sup> It was because mankind were sinners, and needed pardon, and without it could not obtain the Divine favour and blessing, that God the Creator came and dwelt among us, *and was made in the likeness of*

<sup>99</sup> Matt. i. 21, 23.

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah vii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. ii. 7.

*men.*<sup>2</sup> The benefits derived from it are briefly mentioned by our apostle, *Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*<sup>3</sup>

The purpose then for which Christ came into the world was to make reconciliation for sin, and so by Himself to purge or cleanse us from our sins, *to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*<sup>4</sup> But before this event took place, He perfectly obeyed the law of God which man had broken, and that in every stage of life from infancy to manhood, by which He *fulfilled all righteousness*, and magnified the law, and made it honourable, and left *us an example that we should follow His steps.*<sup>5</sup> On this account pardoning mercy, and both justifying and sanctifying grace, and everlasting salvation, are bestowed upon the sinful children of men through Jesus Christ our Lord, by means of believing on His name. And all who are sensible of their need of these blessings are directed to seek them earnestly for Christ's sake, and are assured that asking they *shall receive, that their joy may be full.*<sup>6</sup> We are as welcome to receive them freely, as if we were able to

<sup>3</sup> Heb. ii. 14, 15. <sup>4</sup> Heb. ix. 26. <sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 21. <sup>6</sup> John xvi. 24.

purchase them. Nothing is required of us, but to acknowledge them as His benefits, and to use them to the glory of the bounteous Giver. And this He enables His people by His grace to do. Let us then come as poor to be enriched with spiritual blessings, as naked to be clothed, as destitute to be relieved, as hungry and thirsty to be filled and refreshed. Thus coming and casting ourselves upon His free unmerited bounty, we shall not be sent empty away. He will receive us graciously, and bless us abundantly. He will give us His grace now, and glory hereafter. Such is the blessedness prepared for those whom God came to redeem. Let them celebrate His birth with joyful hearts. When such blessed consequences ensue, surely the time of the bringing *in* of *the first begotten into the world* may well be considered as a joyful season, and be commemorated with gladness of heart by the humble believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to notice

*Thirdly*, The Divine proclamation concerning the Son of God: *Let all the angels of God worship Him.* That the hosts of heaven do worship and serve and obey the Son of God we have the fullest evidence. St. John, when he *saw visions of God* in the isle of Patmos, relates, *I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten*

*thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.*<sup>7</sup> Such is the worship which is given to the Son of God in heaven. We owe Him the same worship as they pay; for it is in the character of the Lamb slain that He receives this worship. Those who can add, *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and the apostolical doxology, Unto him that loved us, tongue, and people, and nation,*<sup>8</sup> will readily join in *and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*<sup>9</sup>

When our adorable Redeemer was brought *into the world*, the angelic hosts were not uninterested spectators of the wonderful event. *A multitude of the heavenly host* appeared to the astonished shepherds of Bethlehem, while *the glory of the Lord shone round about them, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*<sup>10</sup> Thus they sang of the blessings which were to flow from

<sup>7</sup> Rev. v. 11, 12.   <sup>8</sup> Rev. iv. 11.   <sup>9</sup> Rev. v. 9.   <sup>10</sup> Luke ii. 13, 14.



His incarnation. And it is still said of the mysteries of redemption, *These things the angels desire to look into*, in order that they may know *the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*. Angels ministered to Christ after His temptation in the wilderness, and during His agony in the garden. They were joyful attendants on His resurrection. They announced to His mourning disciples, *The Lord is risen indeed*. And now that He is exalted on the throne of His majesty, they *give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name*; they *worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*, in His holy temple in heaven. They see His face, and chaunt His praises. Let us imitate their example. Let us worship at His footstool. Let us bow down and kneel before the Lord our Maker. Let us praise Him for His incarnation, His sufferings and death; and seek to enjoy the benefits which flow from His great humiliation, in our own souls, to our consolation and joy here on earth; and let us look forward in hope to the full fruition of them in His eternal kingdom and glory; let us *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. This is the privilege of His believing people, while they walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, in the footsteps of His flock, and feeding beside their Shepherd's tent; who will *guide them with His counsel, and afterward receive them to glory*.

## SERMON VI.

FOR THE

### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

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THE MANHOOD OF CHRIST.

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Galatians iv. 4, 5.

BUT WHEN THE FULNESS OF TIME WAS COME,  
GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, MADE OF A  
WOMAN, MADE UNDER THE LAW, TO RE-  
DEEM THEM THAT WERE UNDER THE LAW,  
THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION  
OF SONS.

THE Divinity or proper Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ as the King of glory, the Creator of the universe, the unchangeable and eternal God, *the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*, was the subject to which our attention was specially directed by the Epistle for Christmas day. On this day we are called upon more particularly to consider Him as a partaker of human nature, appearing as a man among men, to undergo all that was requisite for the redemption of mankind from the miserable state to which they had been

reduced by sin; in order that they might be restored to the Divine favour and all the blessings connected with it. The apostle takes an opportunity afforded him for the introduction of this subject, while he was speaking of the superiority of the privileges to which believers in Christ are admitted, in comparison with those which were conferred by the law of Moses. He shows the inferiority of the Mosaical to the Christian dispensation; comparing those who were under the former to the heir of an estate during his minority, who is held under various restrictions; and those who were under the latter to the proprietor, who has entered into possession, and is in the enjoyment of the advantages which are to be derived from it. *Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. The children of God, under the Mosaical dispensation, were in bondage under the elements or rudiments of the world,<sup>11</sup> called carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.<sup>12</sup> These were a shadow of good things to come,<sup>12</sup> and were ordained to be as a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ,<sup>13</sup> to show*

<sup>11</sup> Col. ii. 20.    <sup>12</sup> Heb. ix. 10, x. 1.    <sup>13</sup> Gal. iii. 24.

them their need of Him, and His suitableness to them as a Saviour, that they *might be justified by faith*.

In the text the apostle states when it was that the Mosaical dispensation came to an end, and its yoke of bondage was no longer to be imposed; calling this period *the fulness of time*, of which he speaks more at large to the Ephesians, *That in the dispensation of the fulness of time, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him*. He records in the text the wonderful occurrence of that period, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the blessings conferred by means of it; on which he enlarges further in the two following verses. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*. Let us consider,

*First*, The personal dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Secondly*, The circumstances under which He made His appearance in our world.

*Thirdly*, The object proposed by His incarnation; and

*Fourthly*, The benefit thereby conferred upon all who believe in His name.

And while we meditate upon these things, let it be our prayer that the promised blessing of the

Christian dispensation may be bestowed upon us; that the Spirit of God may be pleased to apply to our hearts the important truths here revealed, so that we may enjoy the benefit referred to.

*First*, The personal dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ is declared, when it is said that *God sent forth His Son*. Our Saviour said of Himself, *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world.*<sup>14</sup> *The Word which was made flesh, and dwelt among us,*<sup>15</sup> was the eternal Son of God, of the same Divine nature with His Father, and *had glory with the Father before the world was.*<sup>14</sup> *He was in the beginning with God, and was God.*<sup>15</sup> He was sent forth from the Father into our world *in the likeness of sinful flesh;*<sup>16</sup> and *made Himself of no reputation*, or emptied Himself of all semblance of the Divine majesty in His general converse with mankind; although His disciples, who were admitted to intimacy with Him, *beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*<sup>15</sup> But on this part of the subject I shall not now enlarge, as it was our principal topic on Christmas day; only remarking that He is called the Son of God as being *over all, God blessed for ever,*<sup>16</sup> a partaker of the Divine nature; in like manner as He is called the Son of man, in consequence of being a partaker of human nature. The text informs us,

<sup>14</sup> John xvi. 28, xvii. 5.   <sup>15</sup> John i. 14, 1, 2.   <sup>16</sup> Rom. viii. 3, ix. 5.

*Secondly*, Of the circumstances under which He made His appearance in our world. He was *made* or *born of a woman*, of a pure virgin. It was beforehand announced to her by the angel Gabriel, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*<sup>17</sup> Thus He was “man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting.” God sent *His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*. He took this likeness upon Himself, but He was *without sin*. He *knew no sin*. He *did no sin*. Sin was not in Him.<sup>18</sup> In all other points He was a man like others, “very man.” He was exposed to hunger and thirst, to cold and weariness, to pain of body and mind. He was assaulted by the powers of darkness, and strengthened by angelic aid. He went through the gradual process of *increase in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man*;<sup>19</sup> so that He appeared in all things to be “very man,” possessed of every quality belonging to human nature. He “was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in His flesh, and in His spirit.”<sup>20</sup> It was needful that He should be a par-

<sup>17</sup> Luke i. 35. <sup>18</sup> 1 John iii. 5. <sup>19</sup> Luke ii. 52. <sup>20</sup> Article xv.



taker of human nature, of our flesh and blood, in order that He might be qualified to be our Redeemer. So the apostle elsewhere argues, *Forasmuch as the children which God had given Him were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same: wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.*<sup>21</sup> By condescending to be *born of a woman*, the Lord Jesus became our near kinsman, and was thus qualified to be the Redeemer of mankind. According to the law of Moses, the next kinsman had the right of redemption, as we learn from the history of Boaz and Ruth.<sup>22</sup> The law of God had directed, *If thy brother wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, after that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him; either his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him.*<sup>23</sup> With a view to this circumstance, in some degree, though not chiefly, it may be that it is added that the Son of God was *made or born under the law*. He was born when the law of Moses was in full force and authority over the people to whom *were committed the oracles of God*. This was evident from its being needful for His mother, in order to her purification from the ceremonial uncleanness contracted by

<sup>21</sup> Heb. ii. 13, 14, 17.   <sup>22</sup> Ruth iv. 4.   <sup>23</sup> Lev. xxv. 47—49.

child-bearing, *to offer a sacrifice, according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons; as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.*<sup>24</sup> As one born under the law our blessed Saviour was subject to all its injunctions and ordinances, which He perfectly obeyed. He is represented as saying in the language of prophecy, *Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.*<sup>25</sup> And He said Himself, *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*<sup>26</sup> For this reason it was testified of Him, *He will magnify the law, and make it honourable,*<sup>27</sup> by His perfect obedience to it. On account of His having *fulfilled all righteousness*, having perfectly obeyed all its righteous commands, He is said to be *the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*. This remark is connected with the

*Third* point to be noticed, The object proposed by His incarnation; which was, *to redeem them that were under the law*. In the beginning of the epistle to the Romans the apostle shows that all mankind were bound to obey the moral law, Gentiles as well as Jews. That the Jews

<sup>24</sup> Luke ii. 24, 23. <sup>25</sup> Ps. xl. 7, 8. <sup>26</sup> Matt. v. 17. <sup>27</sup> Isa. xlii. 21.

were under the law needed no proof, they boasted in being possessed of it. The apostle therefore thinks it sufficient to show that they had most grievously transgressed it. He asks them, *Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.*<sup>28</sup> And having proved with regard to both Jews and Gentiles that they were all under sin, he concludes, *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God; therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*<sup>29</sup> In this epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul makes the same statement, *That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident; for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*<sup>30</sup> All mankind then being transgressors of the law of God, and under its curse on account of their disobedience, *God sent forth His Son* to deliver them from the dreadful state into which they had been brought by sin. For this purpose it was needful that the Son of

<sup>28</sup> Rom. ii. 23, 24.    <sup>29</sup> Rom. iii. 9, 19, 20.    <sup>30</sup> Gal. iii. 10, 11, 13.

God should place Himself in our circumstances ; that He should become *bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh*, in order that in human nature He might endure the curse to which all mankind were exposed. Hence it was that He was *born of a woman, born under the law*, that as our near kinsman He might be qualified to *redeem them that were under the law*. He came down from heaven, and took our nature upon Himself, in order that He might *bear our sins in His own body on the tree*. He endured the curse and wrath of God, which our sin deserved, that He might redeem or deliver us from it, by suffering as the substitute for guilty man. He was accounted and treated as the guilty transgressor of the law, that we might be freed from the penalty of sin by believing in His name. With what joy then ought we to celebrate the coming of our Redeemer into the world. With what gratitude ought we to commemorate His wonderful compassion and love ; since, as our apostle says, *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.*<sup>38</sup> If we are duly sensible of the awfulness of the state in which all mankind are by nature, as sinners against God, while *without Christ* ; we shall esteem an interest in His redemption the most desirable thing in the world ; since it is by this alone that we can be *delivered from the wrath*

*to come.* The apostle not only mentions this object, as proposed by the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, but he also states,

*Fourthly,* The benefit which is conferred by it upon His believing people; *that we might receive the adoption of sons,* or be made the children of God, be adopted into the family of heaven, become *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.* This is an inestimable privilege; a privilege which was forfeited by our first parents when they transgressed the Divine command, but which is restored to them *that believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God,* who are made *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* All those who by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer, who put their trust in His redemption, are admitted to the enjoyment of this great privilege. It is the peculiar privilege with which those only who cordially embrace the sacred truths of the Christian religion are favoured. It is a privilege which is frequently spoken of in the New Testament in such a manner as evinces it to be the glory of Christianity. The thought of the blessings connected with it filled the mind of the apostle St. John with the most exalted rapture; so that he exclaimed, *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!* The future blessedness of the children of God was that to which his mind

was chiefly directed ; in consequence of which he added, *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.*<sup>31</sup>

But in the Epistle for this day our apostle speaks of the privilege which the children of God enjoy in this life. *Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.* The Spirit of God dwells in the hearts of all the children of God. By His gracious influence upon their minds they are enabled with confidence, but at the same time with the deepest humility, under a conviction of their own unworthiness to partake of so great a privilege, to approach the God of heaven as their reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, and to regard Him as a tender Parent, and an almighty Protector. Therefore it is said that *through Christ Jesus we have access by the Spirit unto the Father.*<sup>32</sup>

But by the Spirit of God *crying Abba, Father,* we may understand particularly that all real believers in Christ are praying persons. This is a characteristic by which the family and *household of faith* have always been distinguished. When the apostle Paul was converted to the Christian faith, it was said of him, as a proof of the great

<sup>31</sup> 1 John iii. 1, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Eph. ii. 18.



change that had taken place in him, *Behold he prayeth*. Until a man prays earnestly, it is very evident that he cannot be anxious to obtain the Divine blessing. But when *the Spirit of grace and of supplications*<sup>33</sup> is poured out upon the children of men, they draw nigh to God as their Father, to *worship Him in spirit and in truth*.<sup>34</sup> In our daily approaches to the throne of grace we are directed to pray to God as *our Father*. It is however only as our reliance is placed upon the merits of the Son of God our Redeemer and Mediator, that we can do this; for He declared, *No man cometh unto the Father but by Me*.<sup>35</sup> But when we approach the throne of grace in His all-prevailing name, we may be assured that *like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him*.<sup>36</sup> We are therefore encouraged to spread all our wants before Him, to make known to Him all our concerns, to lay before Him all our complaints, to seek His direction in all our affairs, both temporal and spiritual; and to believe that He will supply all our need, will guide us with His counsel, will protect us by His mighty power, will preserve us from all evil, *will be a Father unto us in the fullest sense of the word, will own us as His children, and will cause all things to work together for our good, that He may be glorified in us and by us*. Let it be our

<sup>33</sup> Zech. xii. 10. <sup>34</sup> John iv. 24. <sup>35</sup> John xiv. 6. <sup>36</sup> Ps. ciii. 13.

earnest prayer, that God would be pleased to send *the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father*, that we may enjoy the blessedness which is the portion of His children in time and in eternity; that we may have a sure refuge in every time of trouble, and may know where to go with confidence when all other help fails.

The words *Abba, Father*, seem to have been repeated in two languages, for the purpose of denoting what the apostle said to the Romans, *There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him*,<sup>37</sup> or, *there is no respect of persons with God*.<sup>38</sup> The former is the Jewish, the latter the Greek or Gentile word to express the same thing. It was important to intimate this, at a time when the Jews valued themselves so greatly on account of their outward privileges; and were disposed to imagine themselves to be the only people of God, which in a national point of view had been truly the case. The apostle therefore asked at another time, *Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles?* To which he replied, *Yes, of the Gentiles also; seeing it is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith*.<sup>39</sup> Both Jews and Gentiles are equally accepted of God as His children by faith in Christ Jesus.

<sup>37</sup> Romans x. 12. <sup>38</sup> Romans ii. 11. <sup>39</sup> Rom. iii. 29, 30.

The greatness of the privilege of being permitted to draw nigh to God, and to contemplate Him by faith in this endearing character of *our Father*, if further intimated by a comparison of the state of the people of God before and since the coming of Christ. Under the Old Testament they were servants, or at best, minors, which, the apostle says, *differeth nothing from a servant*. This however is a great honour. The Psalmist thought it so, when he said, *I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness,*<sup>40</sup> or in the most honourable station among the ungodly. But of believers in Christ the apostle says, *Thou art no more a servant but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*; which privilege he more fully explained, when he said to the Romans, *The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.*<sup>41</sup> Here is one blessing heaped upon another; a privilege vouchsafed in this life as a foretaste and earnest of future blessedness. So our Saviour said to His disciples, *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I*

<sup>40</sup> Psalm lxxxiv. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Rom. viii. 16.

*have made known unto you.*<sup>42</sup> Believers in Christ then are not merely servants, who are kept at a distance from their Lord, and employed only in waiting upon Him; they are His friends, who are admitted into His presence to hold intercourse with Him; they are the children of God, who are permitted to call Him their Father; and as such are admitted into His presence at all times, to have communion and fellowship with Him; and to make known to Him all their complaints and desires, as a child makes known his wants to his earthly parent.

But this is not all. Those who partake of this privilege here on earth, who have God for their Father through faith in Christ Jesus, are also *heirs of God through Christ, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*, who shall be *glorified together* with their Lord and Saviour in His eternal kingdom; for *when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory,*<sup>43</sup> and *receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*<sup>44</sup> They are *begotten to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them*; and for which they are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time;<sup>45</sup> and of which they shall assuredly be put in possession when they shall see Him as He is.

<sup>42</sup> John xv. 15. <sup>43</sup> Col. iii. 4. <sup>44</sup> 1 Pet. v. 4. <sup>45</sup> 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

Such is the blessedness to which it is the privilege of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to look forward, in the hope of enjoying it when time with them shall be no more. As they *receive the adoption of sons* in consequence of being interested in the redemption of Christ; as they are adopted into the family and *household of faith*; they are also *sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of their inheritance*, the pledge to them that they shall obtain *the purchased possession, unto the praise of the glory*<sup>46</sup> of their redeeming God and Saviour. How far below our privileges do we live, if we are not looking for the fulfilment of these *exceeding great and precious promises*<sup>47</sup> of God, and believing that *He is faithful who hath promised*, and will fulfil them to His waiting people. If we put our trust in the redemption of Christ for the pardon of our sins and our justification before God, and implore the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit to be vouchsafed to us, *according to our faith it shall be done unto us*; and being *washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*,<sup>48</sup> we shall be enabled to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*.

<sup>46</sup> Eph. i. 13, 14.    <sup>47</sup> 2 Pet. i. 4.    <sup>48</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11.

# SERMON VII.

FOR THE

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS;

OR,

*THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.*

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THE SIGN AND THE SEAL.

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Romans iv. 11.

AND HE RECEIVED THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION, A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH WHICH HE HAD YET BEING UNCIRCUMCISED; THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FATHER OF ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE, THOUGH THEY BE NOT CIRCUMCISED; THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO.

ON entering upon a new year, it is natural to review the past, and to look forward to the future. In both these cases, whether we look backward or forward, the declaration with which the Epistle for this day opens is exceedingly appropriate: *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord*



*will not impute sin.* To the serious mind a review of the past cannot but cause acute pain, however greatly it may be mingled with gratitude. And future prospects will generally be regarded with some kind of apprehension, even when there is ground for indulging the most lively hope. In retrospective considerations the Christian cannot but feel pain in consequence of the ravages which have been made on his soul and body by sin; which is the bane of his existence. He feels that he carries about with him a body of sin and death; against which it is needful for him to strive and struggle day by day; and that he is surrounded by temptations from without, with which he is naturally inclined to comply; but which must be resisted in order to the peace of his conscience. When therefore he considers both his sinfulness and his weakness, his past offences and his liability to be turned aside, he cannot but rejoice that *there is forgiveness with God, that He may be feared, that with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption;*<sup>49</sup> and that He will vouchsafe these blessings to all those who earnestly seek them in His appointed way. The abounding of iniquity does not lessen the evil of it in the view of the Christian; but will rather cause him to regard it with the greater dread and

<sup>49</sup> Ps. cxxx. 4, 7.

abhorrence. The universality of its prevalence makes its deformity more apparent, and more aggravated. If we have right ideas respecting sin, it cannot but distress and humble us deeply, that we should ourselves be so much under the influence of what is so highly displeasing to God. But when we read that *the Lord will not impute sin* to the humbled penitent who mourns over it and turns from it, and who implores pardoning mercy through the sacrifice of Christ our Redeemer; then gratitude will fill our hearts, that a plan should have been formed by infinite wisdom for the forgiveness of sin, and that *who-soever will* may come and apply for the benefit, and shall not be *cast out, or sent empty away*. Let this be our encouragement to seek for ourselves an enjoyment of the blessing, that we may live as pardoned sinners in the service of our God, and to His glory.

The apostle having shown by this quotation from the thirty-second Psalm, the blessedness consequent upon the forgiveness of sin, proceeds to inquire what description of persons were admitted to the enjoyment of this privilege. The Jews had thought themselves to be the only persons who could be interested in it, as they were the peculiar people of God; of which they had, as they conceived, an undeniable proof, since they had been admitted into the visible church of God by the divinely instituted rite of

circumcision. He asks, *Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?* If the former, the Jews must have been entitled to it through Abraham, their ancestor, with whom God was pleased to enter into a covenant, of which circumcision was the token or sign. The apostle gloried in his descent from Abraham, as well as the rest of his nation; because the patriarch had been *called the friend of God*, in consequence of being accounted righteous in His sight. He observes, *We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.* It was because *Abraham believed God*, that he was accepted with Him, and accounted righteous before Him. But, he asks, *How was it then reckoned?* When was righteousness imputed to him; *when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?* To this question he replies, *Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.* The blessing was granted by God to Abraham before this token of covenant relationship with him and his family was given to them. *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.* Circumcision was a sign and seal of his justification before God, and not the cause of it. It was in consequence of his faith, and

not in consequence of circumcision, that he became the father of a spiritual seed; for such only of his natural seed, or his posterity, were really numbered among the children of God, as were partakers of his faith. He is therefore called *the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.* So the apostle wrote to the Galatians, *If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*<sup>50</sup> And here he argues further, that God never designed to confine the blessings of pardon and salvation to the descendants of Abraham, or to those only who were circumcised; for in that case the promise made to Abraham, *In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,*<sup>51</sup> could never have been fulfilled. But as his justification before God was entirely independent of the rite which was afterwards appointed to be observed by him and his posterity; *the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.* The promise that he should *be a father of many nations,* was made before the law of circumcision was instituted; and therefore it could not be intended that the blessings which were to be conferred through

<sup>50</sup> Gal. iii. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Gen. xii. 3.

Abraham upon mankind were to be limited to his circumcised descendants; but that all *they which be of faith* should be blessed with faithful Abraham.<sup>52</sup> For if *they which are of the law be heirs*, if such only be accounted the children of God, *faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.* In this manner the apostle argued that it was the will of God *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body with the Jews, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.*<sup>53</sup> It was of importance to make this statement at the time when the apostle wrote, in consequence of the prejudices of the Jews on the subject. It is important to us as showing that it is not in consequence of partaking in any outward privileges, or of complying with any external ceremonies, that we are accounted the children of God; but solely because of being interested in the merits and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ by believing in His name.

Let us now direct our attention more particularly to the statement of the apostle in the text.

*First,* To the reason which he gives for the institution of the ordinance of circumcision: and

*Secondly,* To the benefits derived by mankind, or the world at large, from the faith of Abraham.

<sup>52</sup> Gal. iii. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Ephesians iii. 6.

May the Spirit of God apply the subject to our hearts, that we may be blessed with faithful Abraham, by being made partakers of the same faith, for which he was so conspicuous.

*First*, The reason given for the institution of the ordinance of circumcision, is, *He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.* At the original institution of this sacred ordinance, God said to Abraham, *It shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you*;<sup>54</sup> that is, a token or sign that they took the Lord for their God, and were desirous of being accounted His people, and acknowledged themselves as such; and were therefore bound to live in obedience to His laws, were *debtors to do the whole law*<sup>55</sup> which He commanded; the revelation of which was afterwards renewed by the hand of Moses. The apostle intimates that Abraham was directed to observe the sign or token of the covenant which God established with him, because *he believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness*.<sup>56</sup> This faith of Abraham is mentioned Genesis xv. 6, *He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness.* And it there refers to the promise which God had made to him, that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude. He took

<sup>54</sup> Gen. xvii. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Gal. v. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Rom. iv. 3.



God at His word, *being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was able also to perform; and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.* He was accepted with God, on account of believing His word; and the ordinance of circumcision was instituted for a token or sign of the covenant which God made with him.

But the apostle speaks of circumcision as being something more than a sign or token; he calls it also *a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised;* that is, it was a confirmation or an assurance to him of his acceptance with God; a pledge that God would hereafter fulfil all the promises which He had made to His servant; and an evidence of his being admitted to the favour and friendship of God. This is the benefit which St. James informs us was communicated to Abraham in consequence of his faith, *He was called the friend of God;*<sup>57</sup> as all are who are accounted righteous before Him. In token of this friendship, he was required to devote himself, in his person and property, to the service of God; and all who were *born in his house, or bought with his money,* were commanded to *be circumcised.*<sup>58</sup> His infant children were by this ordinance admitted into a covenant relationship to God, in order that they might be instructed to *keep the way of the*

<sup>57</sup> James ii. 23.    <sup>58</sup> Gen. xvii. 12.    <sup>59</sup> Gen. xviii. 19.

*Lord,*<sup>59</sup> and be laid under obligation to *walk in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham.*

All bloody ceremonies being typical, this ordinance of circumcision was abolished by the fulfilment of the types in the appearance of the great Antitype. And baptism having been appointed by our adorable Redeemer for the same purpose as circumcision is represented in the text to have been appointed to Abraham, namely, as a sign and seal of justification by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; or as it is described in our catechism, “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof;” “the baptism of young children is in any wise,” or by all means, “to be retained in the church as most agreeable with the institution of Christ;” for hereby parents are bound to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and children are laid under obligation to believe and to perform the doctrines and duties of Christianity. When our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles to *go and teach*, or make disciples of, *all nations*, and to *baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, adding, *he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*; He evidently appointed baptism to be a sign and seal of righteousness by faith in His name; or that those who believed

and were baptized, were *washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,*<sup>60</sup> or were “made members of Christ, the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.”

The arguments which have been brought forward against infant baptism are equally opposed to infant circumcision. If the one was an ordinance proper to be administered to the infants of the Old Testament church, the other is equally proper for the Christian church. This argument I conceive to be unanswerable; because the same reason exists now for the baptism of infants, as existed formerly for their circumcision. It is incumbent upon Christian parents to dedicate their children to God in the use of that ordinance which points so clearly to the need we have of being cleansed from our natural pollution in the blood of Christ, and *renewed in the spirit of our minds* by the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit; and having thus devoted them to His service, to *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,*<sup>61</sup> that thus being *trained up in the way that they should go, when they are old they may not depart from it.*<sup>62</sup> And it is incumbent upon the children of Christian parents to believe and to do as was promised in their names at their baptism, in order to their admission into the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>60</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11.      <sup>61</sup> Eph. vi. 4.      <sup>62</sup> Prov. xxii. 6.

The Israelites were commanded, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might; and the words which I command thee shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gates.*<sup>63</sup>

All this shows the pains that were required to be taken with the instruction of their children. The Lord God said in commendation of Abraham, that he would do this; *for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*<sup>64</sup> It was in the use of the means that the blessing was bestowed. But if parents present their children for baptism merely in order to secure for them temporal privileges, by having their names appear in the parish register; and neglect the duties which are imposed upon them, in consequence of their compliance with this Divine ordinance, surely it is no wonder that

<sup>63</sup> Deut. vi. 5—9.

<sup>64</sup> Gen. xviii. 19.

their children should turn out to be, what is emphatically termed, baptized infidels. And if Christian parents do not make religion the point of the very first importance in the education of their children, so as to lead them to regard the salvation of their immortal souls as of infinitely greater moment than their worldly advancement; what can be expected otherwise than that their children should be most mindful of the things of this life, and dismiss the concerns of their souls until sickness or old age warn them of the near approach of death and eternity?

Let parents who *profess godliness* consider these things. It is not sufficient to bring your children to be baptized, and to bring them to church at other times; it is your duty also to use your utmost endeavours to impress upon their minds the necessity of personal religion; and to show them the advantages of which they were made partakers by being baptized and dedicated to the service of God in their infancy, and signed “with the sign of the cross, in token that they should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ’s faithful soldiers and servants unto their life’s end.” It is your duty to warn them of their awful responsibility to God for the means of grace which He has vouchsafed to them; and

to pray earnestly for them that they may *not receive the grace of God in vain*, but that He would be pleased to *circumcise their hearts to love Him with all their heart, and with all their soul, that they may live.*<sup>65</sup> The use of the means, and prayer for a blessing upon them, must go hand in hand ; the one cannot be expected to be effectual without the other. But when parents diligently *teach* their children *the good and the right way*,<sup>66</sup> and plead the promise of God before Him, praying for His blessing to accompany their instructions ; it will be found that it is not a vain thing for them to wait upon Him. Let Christian parents remember that it is said, *The promise is unto you and to your children ;*<sup>67</sup> and let them seek earnestly to obtain the blessing for their offspring by the means which God has commanded them to use ; and they will find the benefits resulting from it.

The benefit derived by the Gentiles from the faith of Abraham was to be noticed in the

*Second place.* His faith in God is held forth as an example to mankind, that all who *walk humbly with their God* as he did, shall partake of the Divine blessing. The manner in which this is expressed is, *Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness ; in order that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they*

<sup>65</sup> Deut. xxx. 6.    <sup>66</sup> 1 Samuel xii. 23.    <sup>67</sup> Acts ii. 39.



*be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.* The apostle varies the mode of expression, when he speaks on the same subject in the epistle to the Galatians: *Know ye that they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham.*<sup>68</sup> The patriarch was called *the father of the faithful*; believers in Christ are called *the children of Abraham*. But that which is most important for us to observe in the text is, that we are to seek for righteousness to be imputed to us in the same way as it was imputed to Abraham. For as the apostle states at the end of this chapter, *It was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification, in order that being justified by faith, we might have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>69</sup> Here we are led from the consideration of Abraham, and outward ordinances, to regard the spiritual blessing of which we must ourselves partake, if we would be truly happy. By faith in the promise of God Abraham *was called the friend of God*, and enjoyed the privileges connected with it. By faith in the promise which God has made, through Christ, to them who put their

<sup>68</sup> Gal. iii. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Rom. v. 1.

trust in His atonement for the pardon of their sins; and in His resurrection from the dead as a proof of their Surety's acquittal by Divine justice; and in His obedience as that whereby the law of God was magnified and made honourable; in consequence of this belief, righteousness is imputed to them, they are accounted righteous before God, are justified in His sight, are accepted with Him, are permitted to call Him their Father, and are considered as His children, *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*.<sup>70</sup> What a high privilege is this! Yet this is the privilege to which faith in Christ admits the believer in Him; even to the enjoyment of His favour and friendship, His protection and blessing; to communion and fellowship with Him, and a participation in the cheering and sanctifying influences of the Spirit of His grace; as well as to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*.<sup>71</sup> The righteousness before God, which admits the children of men to all these privileges, is to be obtained only by faith in Christ; but it shall be imputed to all them that believe in His name.

We make a profession of being Christians, we have been baptized into the faith of Christ, we have had the sign of the cross marked upon our foreheads; it therefore becomes us to ask ourselves, Are we really believers in Him, who

<sup>70</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Rom. v. 5.

are *justified by faith*, and at *peace with God*? We have been admitted to partake of the outward privileges of Christianity; but have we been brought nigh to God, to live *as seeing Him who is invisible*,<sup>72</sup> to seek communion with Him, to fear to do what is displeasing in His sight? We must have “the inward and spiritual grace,” as well as “the outward and visible sign,” if we be indeed the children of God. We must partake of “a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness,” the effect of which will be that being *dead to sin* we shall not live in it; but being *alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*, we shall *become the servants of righteousness*.<sup>74</sup> If this evidence do not appear in our life and conduct, we have reason to fear that our profession of Christianity is of no avail, that it will not bring salvation to our souls. It behoves us then to *examine ourselves whether we be in the faith*,<sup>73</sup> whether that righteousness be imputed to us by faith, which leads and enables us to *walk humbly with our God*, to live to His glory, and to show forth His praise. Let us, on our entrance upon this new year, pray earnestly for Divine grace to enable us to *walk in newness of life*,<sup>74</sup> “that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to His eternal joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Amen.

72 Heb. xi. 27.

73 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

74 Rom. vi. 4, xi. 18.

## SERMON VIII.

FOR

### THE EPIPHANY.

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THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST.

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Ephesians iii. 8.

UNTO ME, WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, IS THIS GRACE GIVEN, THAT I SHOULD PREACH AMONG THE GENTILES THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST.

THE subject to which our attention is called on the feast of the Epiphany, on which we commemorate “the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles;” seems to be peculiarly suitable for consideration at our entrance upon a new year. In the Epistle for this day, the apostle Paul speaks of this circumstance as one which excited the utmost astonishment, both in heaven and earth. It was most wonderful that the God of heaven should have compassionated the state of *the world which was lying in wickedness,*<sup>76</sup> having *forsaken Him, the fountain of living waters, and*

*hewed out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns which could hold no water;*<sup>77</sup> which had turned from the worship of the living God to that of idols of wood and stone, and had become as stupid and senseless in their religion as the dumb idols which they worshipped; and, as the natural consequence, were hardened in all manner of iniquity. It was most wonderful that the Son of God should have appeared upon earth to *reconcile the world unto Himself;*<sup>78</sup> so that a distinction should no longer be made between those to whom the knowledge of the true God had been communicated under the Mosaical dispensation, and the rest of mankind; and that in consequence of *God becoming manifest in the flesh,*<sup>79</sup> the gospel of the kingdom should be preached among *all nations, for the obedience of faith.*<sup>80</sup> This was a new event, which excited the displeasure of the ancient people of God, but which caused joy and gladness wherever the gospel of the grace of God was made known by the apostles of Christ. The Jews had been accustomed to regard the God of heaven as exclusively their God, and not *the God of the Gentiles also;*<sup>81</sup> forgetting that it was declared in the holy scriptures, *The God of the whole earth shall He be called.*<sup>82</sup> They could not endure the idea that the nations of the world in general

<sup>76</sup> 1 John v. 19. <sup>77</sup> Jer. ii. 13. <sup>78</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19. <sup>79</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

should be admitted to the enjoyment of the high privileges, which they had been accustomed to regard as belonging to themselves alone; and that these benefits should be conferred upon others without a necessity of submitting to the ceremonial institutions of the law of Moses. The apostles of Christ therefore found it needful to state continually, that the design of the Mosaical dispensation was to keep up in the world the knowledge of the true God, and the way of reconciliation with Him, until the time of the appearing of the Seed of the woman, in whom *all the nations of the earth should be blessed*; and that in consequence of the coming of Christ, and His fulfilment of all righteousness in His own sacred Person, and thus being *the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*<sup>83</sup> in Him, *the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down*; and those who before *were far off from God, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, were made nigh by the blood of Christ*,<sup>84</sup> *were reconciled unto God by the cross, were at peace with Him, and permitted to have access to Him, to come into His most holy presence, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and to call upon the God of heaven*

<sup>80</sup> Rom. xvi. 26.    <sup>81</sup> Rom. iii. 29.    <sup>82</sup> Isa. liv. 5.    <sup>83</sup> Rom. x. 4.



as their *Father*. To the enjoyment of this blessedness the Gentiles were admitted, as well as the Jews, by faith, or through believing *the word of the truth of the gospel*<sup>85</sup> of Christ, and putting their trust in Him as the Redeemer of mankind. It seemed a most astonishing thing to a Jew, that such favour could be shown by the Lord Jehovah to the nations of the earth in general, without *respect of persons*; and therefore the apostle enlarged upon the subject in the Epistle for this day.

He had spoken, at the close of the preceding chapter, of Jews and Gentiles being *builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit*, by faith in Christ; and in this chapter he begins by saying, *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, pray for you, as it is afterwards stated.* He was, at the time when he wrote this epistle, a prisoner at Rome, because of the enmity of the Jews against him, on account of his preaching the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. But he gloried in being *the apostle of the Gentiles*;<sup>86</sup> and therefore he speaks of his office as *the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward.* A dispensation of the gospel was committed to him as a *steward of the mysteries of God*,<sup>87</sup> to publish the salvation of Christ

<sup>84</sup> Eph. ii. 12—14. <sup>85</sup> Col. i. 5. <sup>86</sup> Rom. x. 13. <sup>87</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 1.

throughout the known world. He was commissioned by God Himself; as he said to the Galatians: *I neither received the gospel of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*<sup>88</sup> And here he takes it for granted, that the Ephesians had *heard how that by revelation God made known unto him the mystery of which he had before informed them, as I wrote afore in few words, to which he called their attention, as that whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ;* a matter of great importance for them to notice, in order that the message which he delivered might meet with the reception which it ought to have; *which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.* Those who had been sent by God in former ages, had for the most part preached His word to their own countrymen only; and the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself was confined *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*<sup>89</sup> But after His resurrection from the dead, He commanded His apostles to *go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,*<sup>90</sup> *to every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*<sup>91</sup> in order that *the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with the Jews, and of the same body, the mystical body of*

<sup>88</sup> Gal. i. 12. <sup>89</sup> Matt. xv. 24. <sup>90</sup> Mark xvi. 15. <sup>91</sup> Rev. v. 9.

Christ, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel. This was the mystery which had been hid from ages and from generations,<sup>92</sup> but was now unfolded to the admiration of all who were made acquainted with it; it was their joy that the gospel of Christ was made known to all nations; whereof, says the apostle, *I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power.* He ascribes all to the efficacy of Divine grace, which worked in him mightily, and sweetly constrained him to labour to the utmost of his power in the service of God, to make known the gospel of Christ in every place.

He was deeply sensible of his own unworthiness, and utter insufficiency for the office; but he rejoiced nevertheless that such a dispensation was entrusted to him. *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; or, as he terms it when writing to the Colossians, the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is, Christ in you the hope of glory.*<sup>93</sup> This was his great theme wherever he went preaching the kingdom of God;<sup>94</sup> and the object proposed by it was to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the

<sup>92</sup> Col. i. 36.

<sup>93</sup> Col. i. 27.

<sup>94</sup> Acts xx. 25.

*world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.* The glory of Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, whom He came to seek and to save, notwithstanding they had rebelled against Him, their Creator, to whom their allegiance was due, was that which St. Paul was most anxious at all times to display, in order that the name of God might be magnified. *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known by the church the manifold wisdom of God; for as St. Peter declares, these things the angels desire to look into,*<sup>95</sup> they desire to be made acquainted with the mode in which God is pleased to deal with mankind, in order that they may be led to admire and adore Him with greater wonder, love, and praise.

The plan of salvation for perishing sinners, and the manner in which it was to be made known, was *according to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.* It was formed and carried into effect by His own counsel, and *to the praise of the glory of His grace,*<sup>96</sup> that all the glory of it might be secured to Himself. The great benefit derived from it by those to whom it was made known was reconciliation to God through Christ; *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him; so*

<sup>95</sup> 1 Peter i. 12.

<sup>96</sup> Ephesians i. 6.

that we may draw nigh to God, and be assured that He will draw nigh to us, will hear our humble supplications and grant us His favour, and will bless us both in this life and in that which is to come. In such language the apostle Paul describes the benefits of which the Gentiles, or the world at large, were made partakers, by the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the words to which our attention is now to be directed more particularly, he speaks,

*First*, Of his own unworthiness to fill the office to which he was appointed, of being *the apostle of the Gentiles*.

*Secondly*, Of the nature of his office, and the needful qualification for it; and

*Thirdly*, Of the subject of his ministry.

May the Spirit of God be pleased to influence our hearts and minds, while we consider the important topics here brought before us.

When an apostle of Christ speaks of himself and his ministry in such terms as the text records, it surely becomes those who now minister in holy things to have the most humble thoughts of themselves, and the most exalted ideas of the office with which they have been entrusted. The apostle's estimate of himself was that he was *less than the least of all saints*. So he said to the Corinthians, *I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church*

*of God.*<sup>97</sup> On which he enlarges in his first epistle to Timothy, *I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.*<sup>98</sup> St. Paul had ever the most humble opinion of himself in the sight of God. The deepest self-abasement filled his mind when he reflected on his conduct towards the church of Christ in the days of his ignorance and pride. And notwithstanding he had been admitted into the number of the saints of God, or those who were set apart by Divine grace to be a holy people unto the Lord, the servants of God, separated from *the world that lieth in wickedness,*<sup>99</sup> and made partakers of the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost; yet he never reflected upon his former state without the deepest humiliation before God, and heartfelt gratitude that Divine mercy should have been extended to one who had been so opposed to Himself and His people; and had carried his opposition to so great a length, as to *breathe out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;* and who had in a measure effected his evil desires, having concurred in the stoning of Stephen; and as he afterwards confessed to king Agrippa, *Many of the saints did I shut*

<sup>97</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 9.

<sup>98</sup> 1 Tim. i. 13, 14.

<sup>99</sup> 1 John v. 19.



*up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them: and I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*<sup>1</sup> That notwithstanding all this, Divine mercy should have been extended to him, excited his unceasing admiration and gratitude; and he made mention of it to show that none need think themselves to be beyond the reach of mercy, when, being convinced of their sinfulness, they implore pardon for Christ's sake. He added, *For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, (or the chief of sinners, as he had before acknowledged) Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.*<sup>2</sup> In the text St. Paul constructs a new word to express more forcibly his sense of his utter unworthiness of Divine mercy. He did not think it sufficiently humiliating to call himself *the least of the saints*, but he styles himself *less than the least of all saints*. He does this in order to extol the riches of Divine grace. That the God of heaven should have condescended to regard one who was so totally unworthy of His favour, was to him a subject of astonishment and gra-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvi. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy i. 16.

titude. He felt therefore that he had the most powerful inducement to use every possible means to prove his gratitude to his gracious Benefactor. He felt it to be his bounden duty and his reasonable service to serve the Lord Christ, to endeavour to the utmost to promote His glory, and to make known His great salvation. This was the best way in which he could manifest his thankfulness for the mercy that had been extended to him. And he knew that his speaking humbly of himself would lead others to think that they also had cause to be humbled before God, and that it became them to be *lowly in their own eyes*, on account of their transgressions of His holy law. When he used such language respecting himself, he could with the greater confidence exhort others *not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think ; but to think soberly*<sup>3</sup> and humbly of themselves. When we consider what we actually are, and what we ought to be, according to that which God requires of us in His holy word, we shall be convinced, if we know ourselves, that we have nothing to be proud of, but on the contrary every reason to *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God ; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*<sup>4</sup> This indeed is the first step in the Christian life ; for until we are convinced of

<sup>3</sup> Romans xii. 3.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter v. 5, 6.

sin by the Spirit of God, and humbled on account of it in the Divine presence, the salvation of Christ will not be valued or even really desired by us. May we thus be taught to know ourselves, and become little in our own eyes, that Divine grace may be magnified in us and by us.

The apostle, having expressed his sense of his unworthiness to receive any blessing from God, or to be employed in His service ; speaks,

*Secondly*, Of the office which had been entrusted to him, and the means whereby he was enabled to fulfil its duties. He says, *Unto me is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles.* His office was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles ; and as *the apostle of the Gentiles* he therefore *magnified his office.*<sup>5</sup> Of the manner in which he had fulfilled it, he told the Romans : *From Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ ; yea, I have strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.*<sup>6</sup> But while he thus *went every where preaching the word*, he ascribed all the success which attended his ministry to Divine grace. He said, *By the grace of God I am what I am ; and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain ; but I laboured more abundantly than they all ; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Rom. xi. 13.    <sup>6</sup> Rom. xv. 19, 20.    <sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 10.

He regarded it as a mark of the Divine favour and goodness toward him that he had been placed in the station which he occupied as a minister of the gospel of Christ; and he considered that it was a continually renewed supply of Divine grace which enabled him to labour abundantly in the promotion of the cause of God in the world. He said, *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;* and he ascribed it to the abounding grace of God both that he was enabled to labour, and that his labours were effectual for the purpose for which they were undergone. Without Divine grace he felt himself to be insufficient for the work to which he was called; that he could not prosecute it, that his labour would be in vain. It was a contest with the powers of darkness in which he was engaged; and his arm of flesh was too feeble to oppose the god of this world, and those who were living in willing subjection to his authority. But Divine grace enabled him to triumph over all the power of the enemy; and to be the instrument of *converting sinners from the error of their way,*<sup>8</sup> and persuading them to *turn from idols to serve the living and true God.*<sup>9</sup> The apostle also mentions in the text,

*Thirdly,* The subject of his ministry. This

<sup>8</sup> James v. 20.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Thessalonians i. 9.

was, *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. By this expression he meant to convey an idea of the immense value and importance of the salvation of Christ. At another time he reminded the Christians at Corinth, *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.*<sup>10</sup> So great is the value of *the riches of Christ*, that nothing in this world is to be put in competition with Him. Our Saviour asked, *What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?*<sup>11</sup> He who is not enriched with the knowledge and love of Christ is poor indeed. Whatever worldly wealth he may possess, *he will carry nothing away with him when he dieth ;*<sup>12</sup> *at his end he shall be a fool.*<sup>13</sup> Such is the testimony of unerring truth, of the word of God. The riches of Christ, which He came upon earth to bestow upon the sinful children of men, are those alone which will enrich our souls for eternity. These are spoken of as the riches of His *mercy*, the riches of His *grace*, and the riches of His *glory*.

By the riches of His *mercy*, pardon of sin and reconciliation with God are vouchsafed to those who deserved His wrath and indignation. Pardon and peace with God are riches

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 9. <sup>11</sup> Mark viii. 36. <sup>12</sup> Ps. xlix. 17. <sup>13</sup> Jer. xvii. 11.

of inestimable value. If we have them not, we cannot possibly know what it is to enjoy real happiness. If we have them not, we are *walking in a vain show*,<sup>14</sup> which, although it may possibly even excite the envy and admiration of the world, yet will come to a miserable end, will vanish into everlasting darkness. If we do not partake of these *unsearchable riches*, since they are set before us as to be obtained through Christ, it is because we do not seek for them in the way in which He has promised to bestow them, in the diligent use of the means which He has appointed; our faith and hope are not in Him. *The Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him*;<sup>15</sup> but if we do not diligently seek Him we cannot expect to receive His benefits; *we have not, because we ask not*.<sup>16</sup>

The riches of the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ were to be made known by the apostle, as well as the riches of His *mercy*. In making a distinction between these, it may be observed that the gift of Divine grace proceeds from the mercy of God. We may therefore consider it to refer to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and all the blessings which accompany salvation as the consequence of reconciliation with God. By partaking of the riches of His grace Divine influence descends upon the souls of the children of God,

<sup>14</sup> Psalm xxxix. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Romans x. 12.

<sup>16</sup> James iv. 2.



whereby they are actuated to every good word and work ; so that their *conversation* is such as *becometh the gospel of Christ*. The riches of His mercy and grace are to be obtained by those who supplicate them at His footstool, in order that they may go on their way rejoicing in His holy name.

But the word of God speaks also of *riches in glory by Christ Jesus* ; of which the apostle says to the Philippians, *My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*.<sup>17</sup> Here we are led to look beyond this mortal life to the things which God hath prepared in the world to come for all His people. On this subject he wrote also to the Colossians, *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory*.<sup>18</sup> What a rich portion will then be enjoyed by the humble believer in Christ. We are invited to partake of the spiritual and eternal riches of Christ, that we may be *rich toward God*,<sup>19</sup> and blessed for ever. When we contemplate the value of these riches, they may well be called *unsearchable*. Their real value will be known only in eternity. Let it be our great anxiety to obtain these riches of Christ, that having Him for *all our salvation and all our desire*,<sup>20</sup> we may be blessed in life, in death, and in eternity.

<sup>17</sup> Phil. iv. 19. <sup>18</sup> Col. iii. 4. <sup>19</sup> Luke xii. 21. <sup>20</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

## SERMON IX.

FOR THE

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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THE LIVING SACRIFICE.

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Romans xii. 1.

I BESEECH YOU THEREFORE, BRETHREN, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, THAT YE PRESENT YOUR BODIES A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY, ACCEPTABLE UNTO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE.

THE leading doctrines of Christianity, comprising the fallen state of man as a transgressor of the holy law of God ; the means of pardon and reconciliation with God, and justification before Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ; together with the renewing and sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit ; are stated at some length by the apostle Paul in the former part of this epistle to the Romans. Having thus laid the foundation of true religion, by which man is brought back to God, and into a state of peace

with Him; he shows in the latter part of it what kind of superstructure is to be raised upon this foundation, or how those who are accounted righteous before God ought to walk, in order to be pleasing to Him, who has called them by His grace to the knowledge of Himself, and to be His children, or His peculiar people. Their body, soul, and spirit are to be devoted to His service, to the accomplishment of His holy and blessed will. In the portion of holy writ which is appointed by our church as the Epistle for this day, the apostle sums up all the benefits of which he had been speaking in one word, *mercies*; by which he enforces the obligations under which believers in Christ are laid to live and walk in obedience to the holy law of God. It has been observed that such a system of morals, as the apostle enjoins in this and the following chapters, had never before been exhibited to the world. There is nothing in all the wise precepts of the heathen philosophers to be at all compared with it. All their boasted systems of ethics, however they may be admired in some respects, fall far short of that which is here delineated as the state of mind and conduct which is pleasing to God. Let us direct our attention,

*First*, To the argument or motive by which the exhortation in the text is enforced; and then,

*Secondly*, To the exhortation itself, or what is

required of the children of God, with regard to the manner in which they are to conduct themselves so as to please Him.

May the Spirit of God by His grace impress this exhortation deeply upon our minds, and cause us so to feel its force, that we may be led to comply with that which is required of us.

*First*, The argument or motive by which the exhortation is enforced is drawn from *the mercies of God*. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God. The mercies of God* are the bowels of compassion which He, *the Father of mercies*,<sup>21</sup> has manifested to the children of men that pity and tender love which induced Him to give His only begotten Son to be the Redeemer of mankind, the Saviour of lost sinners, to obey and to suffer all that was needful for the deliverance of the transgressors of His law from that destruction, which by sin they had brought upon themselves. If these *mercies of God* have been made known to us, they will have a most powerful and abiding influence over us. When we consider that but for this love of God we must have perished everlastingly, and have lived all our days in this world without any good hope of obtaining future blessedness; but that, in consequence of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, a way of deliverance *from the wrath to*

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians i. 3.

*come*<sup>22</sup> is set before us; and every obstacle which might prevent us from partaking of eternal salvation is removed out of the way; so that *whosoever will* may come and participate in its blessings; which are bestowed freely, *without money and without price*,<sup>23</sup> upon all who humbly and earnestly apply for them through Christ: when we consider all this, what mercy will that appear to us to be, which confers so great, so undeserved a benefit upon us. Well may we say with the apostle, *Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift*;<sup>24</sup> for that unparalleled love and mercy which He has manifested towards the sinful children of men.

The mercy of God in Christ Jesus ought to sink deep into our minds. It is on account of this that we enjoy any of the comforts with which we are favoured. Were it not for this we should have no enjoyment whatever. Life and health, food and raiment, all temporal as well as spiritual blessings, flow to us from *the mercies of God*. We have forfeited all by sin. Sin exposes us to the wrath of God, and to all the miseries and torments which are endured by those upon whom it abides in the invisible world. Could we lift the veil which conceals this from us, and see the anguish, the wailing and gnashing of teeth, of those who are *reserved under*

<sup>22</sup> 1 Thess. i. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Isa. lv. 1.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. ix. 15.

*darkness to the judgment of the great day,*<sup>25</sup> the consequences of sin would be exposed to our view in a way that would doubtless fill us with the deepest alarm, lest we should be numbered among those who shall drink of the wrath of God for ever. That we are not lifting up our eyes in torments results from *the mercies of God*. And it is because *His mercy endureth for ever,*<sup>26</sup> that we are freed from any calamities.

We may see something of the evil of sin in the sufferings to which mankind are exposed from pain of body or mind, from sickness and disease, from the agonies of death. We should not have been liable to any of these things, but for sin. Sin brought death into the world and all our woe. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*<sup>27</sup> But the sufferings and miseries to which we are exposed in this life, however great they may be, are nothing in comparison with those which will be endured in eternity by those who shall receive *the wages of sin*<sup>28</sup> hereafter. What an awful description is given of them, when it is said, *The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels,*

<sup>25</sup> Jude 6.   <sup>26</sup> Ps. cxxxvi. 1.   <sup>27</sup> Rom. v. 12.   <sup>28</sup> Rom. vi. 23.



*and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascended up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day nor night.*<sup>29</sup> Such is the *wrath to come*. Let us earnestly pray that the *mercies of God* in Christ Jesus may be vouchsafed to us, that we may be delivered from this *wrath to come*, which will overwhelm the ungodly, the impenitent and unbelieving, in eternity, and from which they shall not be able to escape. While we hear that the Lord our God is a merciful God, let us pray earnestly that His mercies in Christ Jesus may be extended to us; and that the Holy Spirit may be pleased to apply the word of mercy and salvation to our hearts, that we may receive forgiveness of sins; and being made *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*,<sup>30</sup> may partake of the blessings of His great salvation, in time and eternity.

But unless *the mercies of God* in Christ Jesus have affected your hearts, in vain is it to make the appeal of the text to you. If I address any who have never been truly sensible of their need of mercy, and have never earnestly sought it, you cannot possibly have received it. *They that are whole*, our Saviour said, *need not a physician, but they that are sick.*<sup>31</sup> This, it is to be feared, is the awful state of too many who hear the word of God. They are insensible of

<sup>29</sup> Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Gal. iii. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Matt. ix. 12.

their lost condition by nature, and of the sinfulness of their hearts and lives, and therefore do not heartily desire or seek to obtain the mercy of God, which is set before them in Christ Jesus. Oh! may such be convinced of their error before it is too late; *and seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near, that He may have mercy upon them, and abundantly pardon*<sup>32</sup> all their offences.

To those who have mourned over their sins, and implored forgiveness through Christ, and have a hope of obtaining it, the sound of *the mercies of God* in Christ Jesus will ever be most delightful; their hearts will ever be deeply affected by it, and its constraining influence will be most effectual. The apostle declared respecting such persons, *The love of Christ constraineth us to live not unto ourselves, but unto Him which died for us and rose again,*<sup>33</sup> *who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*<sup>34</sup> It is to persons of this description, those who have obtained mercy, and are in some degree sensible of their obligations to Him who has had mercy upon them, that the exhortations in the text and following verses are addressed. The apostle calls them his *brethren*, as the children of the same Father, *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*; and he addresses them,

<sup>32</sup> Isa. lv. 6, 7.

<sup>33</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Rom. iv. 25.

as such: *I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* This is that which is required of the children of God with regard to the manner in which they are to conduct themselves so as to please Him; to which our attention is to be directed in the

*Second place.* In like manner the apostle exhorts the Corinthians, *Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*<sup>35</sup> The body, soul, and spirit of the believer in Christ are to be devoted to the service of God. He therefore prayed for the Thessalonians, *The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>36</sup> So it becomes us to pray for ourselves, that God would be pleased to effect in us and for us what He has commanded us to do.

The body is to be presented *a living sacrifice unto God.* Our bodily powers and energies are to be made use of for the promotion of His glory. In this exhortation the apostle evidently alluded to the Divinely appointed ordinance of offering animal sacrifice. Animals were commanded to be put to death, in order to show that the

<sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians vi. 20.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Thessalonians vi. 23.

offerer deserved death for his transgression of the law of God, on account of which the sacrifice was made. But as believers in Christ are delivered from death, because of His having *put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*,<sup>37</sup> having *poured out His soul unto death*<sup>38</sup> as their substitute, in their stead; the sacrifice which they are to present is *a living sacrifice* of themselves; they are to be actively and unreservedly the servants of God, to do His will from the heart. The man who brought his sacrifice parted with all right and title to it as his property. So we are to consider our bodily powers and every faculty we possess as the property of God; and that He is at liberty to dispose of us as He will; and we are bound to live in obedience to all that He hath commanded us in His holy word. Do we thus *yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God?*<sup>39</sup> If not, we are robbing Him of His due. If Divine mercy has been manifested to us, we owe ourselves, our all, to the God of our mercies. Oh! that we were duly impressed with a sense of the obligations under which we lie to Him whose tender mercies have been vouchsafed to us.

But it is a *holy* as well as *a living sacrifice* which we are to *present* to God. Unclean animals, or

<sup>37</sup> Heb. ix. 26.   <sup>38</sup> Isa. liii. 12.   <sup>39</sup> Rom. vi. 13.   <sup>40</sup> Heb. x. 24.

those which had any blemish, were not to be offered to Him under the old dispensation. This shows the purity of heart which is required in the service of God. We must have our *hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience* by faith in the atoning blood of Christ, and our *bodies washed with pure water*,<sup>40</sup> or our persons sanctified and cleansed from *all filthiness of the flesh and spirit* by the purifying influence of the Holy Ghost, otherwise we cannot present ourselves a *holy sacrifice* to God. We must be *washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God*,<sup>41</sup> in order to be acceptable to Him. The people of God are characterised as *a holy nation; and a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*,<sup>42</sup> their great High Priest and Intercessor; and the apostolical command is, *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*.<sup>42</sup> As our Lord Jesus Christ was Himself, *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*,<sup>43</sup> so His people are to *follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*.<sup>43</sup> Every thing that is contrary to holiness of heart and life is to be renounced by the true Christian; and it should be his aim constantly to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11. <sup>42</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 5, i. 15, 16. <sup>43</sup> Heb. vii. 26, xii. 14.

This sacrifice is, further, to be *acceptable to God*. This can only be the case as it is offered up through faith in Christ, in reliance upon His merits, who *ever liveth to make intercession for us*. As St. Peter says, we are *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*. This *living, holy, acceptable sacrifice*, is demanded of us as our *reasonable service*. It is what He who calls for it has a right to require, and what it becomes us as reasonable creatures to render. Those persons act a most irrational part who do not comply with this most reasonable exhortation of the apostle.

This *reasonable service* is to be rendered to God day by day all the days of our lives. Such is the idea conveyed by the word *present*. It denotes a continual presentation, or that it is to continue throughout the whole existence of the bodies which are to be presented to Him, at all times, in all places, on all occasions. Not only on one day of the week, although that day should be kept holy in a peculiar manner; not only in the house of God, although we ought to pay special reverence to His sanctuary; not only at particular seasons, although these should not be disregarded; but we are to *present* our *bodies* continually as *a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service*. As long as we are in the body, all the days of our life, we are to be presenting ourselves as an offering to Him who *giveth to all life and breath and all*



*things*,<sup>44</sup> and whose tender mercies are over all His works. Blessed will they be, both in time and in eternity, who are enabled by Divine grace to comply with this reasonable demand of their Maker and Benefactor.

But the apostle goes on to specify some particulars respecting the sacrifice which, as reasonable creatures, who are thankful for the mercies which we have received, we are to present to God; or what is to be the consequence of this surrender of ourselves to Him. *And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.* What is meant by not being conformed to this world, we learn from a similar exhortation of St. John, to which an explanation is added. *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.*<sup>45</sup> Conformity to the world, then, is living in sin, in disobedience to the commandments of God, and in the pursuit of the transitory pleasures of this life, which perish in the using. Christians are therefore exhorted to *put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt according*

<sup>44</sup> Acts xvii. 25.

<sup>45</sup> 1 John ii. 15—17.

to the deceitful lusts ; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.<sup>46</sup> This means the same as being transformed by the renewing of your mind. To those who profess to be Christians, and yet are conformed to this world, and solicitous only to fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind ;<sup>46</sup> who, though they pray to God, ask amiss that they may consume it upon their lusts, or pleasures ; the apostle James says, *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship, or love, of the world is enmity with God, whosoever therefore will be a friend, or lover, of the world is the enemy of God.*<sup>47</sup> Instead of being conformed to this world in its wickedness, in its pleasures, in its pride, in its forgetfulness of God, and its disregard of His authority and of His laws, the Christian is to seek conformity to the image of his Lord and Saviour, by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon his soul ; to be transformed by the renewing of his mind. And the end proposed by this is, *that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God ;* or that, fulfilling the good and perfect will of God, as He has commanded, we may be acceptable to Him, by doing that which is well pleasing in His sight. But this is to be pursued with humility, not setting up ourselves,

<sup>46</sup> Ephesians iv. 22—24, ii. 2.

<sup>47</sup> James iv. 3, 4.

as if we were more worthy than others, on account of abstaining from those evils which others practise.

Against this the apostle thinks it needful to guard. *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.* We are very apt to think ourselves better than others, if we do not approve of their evil practices, and do not adopt or follow them. We should beware of giving way to pride in assuming an appearance of singularity. People may be as proud of singularity as of fashion. *The renewing of the mind* should be that in which the great difference should exist between the Christian and the worldling. Where this has taken place, humility will be its fruit, true humility of heart. We shall *think soberly* respecting ourselves ; and shall ascribe every advantage we enjoy above others to the goodness and mercy of God, and not to our own desert. If we have faith in Christ, it is the gift of God, which He has bestowed upon us of His grace ; and its possession is itself a proof of our merit. For had we not forfeited every blessing by sin, we should have no need that the merits of another should be imputed to us for our justification before God. And notwithstanding this

benefit has been vouchsafed to us, we are still unprofitable servants, who are prone to fail in our duty towards God, and fall very far short of what we ought to be.

And further, there are many others who, through the goodness of God, are partakers of the same gift of His bounty; as the apostle proceeds to observe, *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.* We have reason to bless God that this is the case; and to cultivate union and fellowship with those who are of the mystical body of Christ; thanking our heavenly Father, that through His goodness and mercy towards us, we have been *called to the fellowship of His Son,*<sup>48</sup> and numbered among those who believe in His name.

The apostle goes on to state what are the duties of the members of His mystical body towards each other, and towards all men, in the remainder of this chapter from which the Epistles for the two next Sundays are taken, and to which, therefore, our attention will then be directed, should it please God to spare us, and to permit us then to meet together. The particular object of the Epistle for this day is to impress our minds with a sense of our obligations to Almighty God for

<sup>48</sup> 1 Corinthians i. 9.

His mercies bestowed upon us, if we are Christians indeed. This is a most powerful motive to excite us to abound in every good word and work, and to avoid whatever is displeasing to Him who has had mercy on us.

A most affecting appeal is here made to prevail upon believers in Christ to adopt that conduct which is suitable to a profession of true religion. Let us then consider attentively what is required by God of His people, who have obtained mercy from Him. Let us cultivate an abiding sense of *the mercies of God* in Christ Jesus, of our own unworthiness to partake of them, and of His goodness in showing such wonderful compassion and loving kindness to such sinful and undeserving creatures as we are. Let us earnestly implore the grace of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live and walk according to His blessed will; that our hearts and minds being renewed, our hopes may be surely there fixed where true joys are to be found. Let obedience to the revealed will of God mark our conduct; and especially let us manifest that humbleness of mind and love to the brethren, which are here enjoined upon us, to the glory and praise of our heavenly Father.

# SERMON X.

FOR THE

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

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Romans xii. 12.

REJOICING IN HOPE, PATIENT IN TRIBULATION, CONTINUING INSTANT IN PRAYER.

THE Epistle for this day is a continuation of the chapter from which that for last Sunday was taken. It points out the duties which pertain to those who *are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*. It directs them how they *ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God*;<sup>49</sup> or as those who *are built up a spiritual house*,<sup>50</sup> *for an habitation of God through the Spirit*.<sup>51</sup>

And *first*, with regard to such as are appointed to exercise the office of the ministry, to communicate to their fellow-sinners the glad tidings of salvation through Christ. Of these persons it is said, *Having then gifts differing according to*



*the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.* It was necessary that these persons should be endowed with spiritual gifts for the discharge of the duties of their sacred office. These gifts differed according to the grace bestowed upon each. Wherever grace is spoken of as the gift of God, it is so described in order that we may be led to seek it diligently, and thus may obtain it from Him. The more importunately and perseveringly we seek it, the more we shall obtain; for God is a liberal Giver to them that seek His spiritual gifts. They shall not wait upon Him in vain. The apostle here speaks of the grace given to him as a labourer in God's vineyard; in like manner as he says to the Corinthians, *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation.*<sup>52</sup> It was by the grace of God that he was employed to be a builder in erecting the spiritual temple of God. By the grace of God he was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. He said, *By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*<sup>53</sup> Without this grace of God, no good can be done by ministers, nor benefit derived

<sup>49</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 15. <sup>50</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 5. <sup>51</sup> Eph. ii. 22. <sup>52</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 10.

by hearers. How earnestly then ought we all to pray for Divine grace to prevent and go before us continually, that ministers may exercise their gifts for the glory of God, and the good of the souls of their hearers. The apostle entreated his hearers, *Pray for me that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.*<sup>54</sup> How much more reason have we, who now minister the word of life, to beseech our hearers to implore the blessing of God on our behalf, that we may have grace given to us, whereby we may be enabled rightly to explain and apply His holy word, and that you may so hear that your souls may live.

It was by the gifts bestowed upon the ministers of the word that they were enabled to *prophecy*, or to preach the gospel. The nature of this office the apostle explains, by saying to the Corinthians, *He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*<sup>55</sup> The ministers of the gospel are therefore in the New Testament frequently called *prophets*; not as foretelling future events, but as preaching the word of God. It is said, *Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them*<sup>56</sup> in the faith of the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul divides

<sup>53</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 19. <sup>54</sup> Eph. vi. 19, 20. <sup>55</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 3. <sup>56</sup> Acts xv. 32.

the ministers of Christ into three classes, *first, apostles ; secondarily, prophets ; thirdly, teachers.*<sup>57</sup> These persons were to prophesy *according to the proportion of faith*, or rather, I conceive, according to the analogy of the faith ; as St. Peter expresses the same idea, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*<sup>58</sup> Every minister should be careful to speak what is in strict accordance with the faith of the gospel, called by St. Jude, *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints ;*<sup>59</sup> or to build up his hearers *on their most holy faith ;* that they may have a right understanding of Divine truth, according to the word of God, so as not to be turned aside, or *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*<sup>60</sup> It is lamentable to see the instability which appears in some hearers of the word of God, through a want of establishment in the faith of the gospel ; notwithstanding the advantages which they enjoy of sound instruction in the faith. When the right foundation has been laid, it is needful to *take heed how we build thereupon*, that we may not bring a reproach upon our Christian profession.

The apostle next speaks of those who were appointed to the office of deacon ; *or ministry, let us wait on our ministering.* They were to be mindful of the duties imposed upon them by their office, as it is described in the sixth chap-

<sup>57</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 28. <sup>58</sup> 1 Peter iv. 11. <sup>59</sup> Jude 3. <sup>60</sup> Eph. iv. 14.

ter of the Acts of the Apostles; which in those days consisted especially in the proper distribution of the alms, supplied by the church, to the poor. But as other duties were connected with this office, to which the name of ministerial duties is now especially appropriated, the apostle directs both these orders of ministers, *prophets and teachers*, to attend to teaching, or the giving of instruction and information with respect to the doctrines of Christianity, together with exhortation in their discourses; *or he that teacheth on teaching; or he that exhorteth on exhortation*. Christian instruction is to be laid as the foundation, and is to be followed up with exhortation to the belief and practice of its doctrines and precepts, that the minds of the hearers may be more deeply impressed with them. So the apostle spoke of himself and his brethren in the ministry, as *warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*.<sup>61</sup> The deacons were likewise to distribute the alms of the church with simplicity or impartiality. *He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity*. The overseer of the church, or bishop, was to be eminent for his diligence in watching over the charge committed to him, to set an example of vigilance in the station in which he was placed. *He that ruleth, or pre-*

<sup>61</sup> Col. i. 28.

sideth, *with diligence*. So the apostle exhorted the elders of the church who came to him at Miletus, *Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.*<sup>62</sup>

Having given these directions to the ministers of the church, the bishops, priests, and deacons, the apostle proceeds to exhort the Christian community at large, *He that showeth mercy, let him do it with cheerfulness*. Those who had it in their power to manifest kindness and compassion to the sick and needy, were to do so with readiness and pleasure, in order to show their gratitude to God for His goodness to them, in giving them *all things richly to enjoy*. They were to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*<sup>63</sup> There was no compulsory community of goods, I apprehend, in the primitive church; nothing further was required from converts to the Christian faith, than that which proceeded from their spontaneous liberality. Those who were disposed to show mercy and compassion to the poor, were directed to *give every man according as he purposed in his heart; not grudgingly, or of necessity,*<sup>64</sup> but with cheerfulness, as taking pleasure in giving their superfluity, or what they thought they could

<sup>62</sup> Acts xx. 28.

<sup>63</sup> Acts xx. 35.

<sup>64</sup> 2 Cor. ix. 7.

spare, to the poorer members of the church of Christ. They were to do this *in singleness of heart, as to the Lord*, knowing that *God loveth a cheerful giver*.<sup>65</sup>

Love to Christ, and to one another, as members of His mystical body, was the badge of their profession. This the apostle therefore exhorted them to cultivate. *Let love be without dissimulation*, or hypocrisy, not hollow, but sincere. *Abhor that which is evil*. Hate wickedness of every kind. This is the way to avoid the practice of it. *Cleave to that which is good*; as he said also to the Philippians, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things, and do*<sup>66</sup> these things. And as to the exercise of love, they were to *be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another*. They were to regard each other with the affection that subsists between the nearest relations in life, each treating the other with respect, esteem, and honour.

As to their general conduct, they were to be *not slothful in business*. In that which required diligence of them, as members of the community, they were *with quietness to work, and eat their*

<sup>65</sup> 2 Cor. ix. 7.

<sup>66</sup> Phil. iv. 8.



*own bread*, to use their endeavours to obtain an honest livelihood; to *provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*<sup>67</sup> Yet in the midst of their worldly avocations, they were to be *fervent in spirit*, having their minds warmly alive to the things of God and heaven, recollecting that *here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come,*<sup>68</sup> and *serving the Lord*, with all humility of mind, living as His servants, making it their first business to obey His will in all things.

As those who looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God,<sup>69</sup> they were to be *rejoicing in hope* of the fulfilment to them of all the promises of God hereafter; to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. And therefore to be *patient in tribulation*, in all the afflictions which they might be called to endure in this transitory world; and *continuing instant in prayer; in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*, making known their requests unto God.

With regard to the members of the church of Christ, the apostle directs them to *distribute to the necessity of saints, to be given to hospitality*. This might refer especially to those brethren who went about, as the apostles did, from place to place, to preach the gospel, or to communi-

67 2 Cor. viii. 21.

68 Heb. xiii. 14.

69 Heb. xi. 10.

cate Christian instruction, and keep up intercourse between the different bodies of Christians in various parts of the world. A person who distinguished himself by such hospitality, is highly commended by St. John, who wrote to him, *Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church; whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well; because that for His name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.*<sup>70</sup>

But Christian love is to be manifested not only to the brethren, but also to enemies. The apostle therefore proceeds, *Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.* All kind of ill-will and animosity is to be avoided towards all men; but sympathy is to be cultivated with regard to Christian brethren. *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.* Unanimity and humility are also enjoined upon them. *Be of the same mind one toward another;* and this in order, as the apostle afterwards observes, *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>71</sup> They were not to seek their own exaltation or pre-eminence; *Mind not high things, but condescend*

<sup>70</sup> 3 John 5—8.

<sup>71</sup> Romans xv. 6.

*to men of low estate ; or take an interest in the affairs of the humble and poor, as well as in those of persons of a higher rank in life ; since God accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of His hands.*<sup>72</sup>

Such is the conduct which Christianity inculcates upon its professors, and which those who are influenced by the consideration of *the mercies of God* vouchsafed to them, are bound to follow. Let us seek grace from God to enable us to live such Christian lives, as it is here shown we ought to do, that we may *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*,<sup>73</sup> and may manifest that we have not received the gospel of *the grace of God in vain*. It is only as we are influenced by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we shall fulfil this our bounden duty and reasonable service. This grace we must seek by humble and earnest prayer, if we would obtain it.

Having now briefly noticed the various exhortations contained in the Epistle for this day ; let us revert more particularly to those which are presented to us in the text. As the last of these exhortations may be considered to be closely connected with those which precede it, we may regard it as a direction to be importu-

<sup>72</sup> Job xxxiv. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Titus ii. 10.

nate in supplication at the throne of grace, in reference both to the present circumstances, and to the future hopes of the children of God.

The character of the child of God here on earth is that of a suppliant or petitioner, one who is *continuing instant in prayer*. That which compels him to have continual recourse to the throne of grace, is the state of affliction or tribulation in which he is usually placed in some respect or other in this world. This was especially the state of the primitive Christians. The apostle therefore found it needful to exhort the Thessalonians, *That no man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*<sup>74</sup>

And while he besought those among whom he had gone preaching the kingdom of God, *to continue in the faith*, he did not refrain from reminding them that in that case affliction would attend them, *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*<sup>75</sup> So our blessed Saviour also declared to His disciples, *In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*<sup>76</sup> The first Christians were exposed to a great deal of affliction and persecution in consequence of their

<sup>74</sup> 1 Thess. iii. 3, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Acts xiv. 22.

<sup>76</sup> John xvi. 33.

Christian profession. It was therefore needful to admonish them to be *patient in tribulation*. The apostle addresses the Hebrews as having *endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.*<sup>77</sup> And in the persecutions to which they were exposed, he says to them, *Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves, that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*<sup>77</sup> Thus it appears that it was because of their *rejoicing in hope* of good things to come, that they suffered patiently what they were called to endure from the ungodly world around them.

Blessed be God, we are not required in our day, and especially in our own country, to risk either our lives or our property by a profession of genuine Christianity. On the contrary, a profession of true religion, where consistency of character is maintained, is rather honourable than otherwise; for however despised it may be by some persons in secret, it is usually honoured in public. True religion is established by the laws of the land; and we can worship God according to His holy word, or as He has commanded us, while none dare to disturb or make us afraid. Yet still it will always be true,

<sup>77</sup> Heb. x. 32—34.

in some respects, that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*;<sup>78</sup> for the world cannot love those who, like their Divine Master, *testify of it, that the works thereof are evil*.<sup>79</sup> The true Christian by his life and conduct, as far as it is regulated by the word of God, condemns the world. He affords to the children of this world a practical proof that they are wrong. They cannot but feel convinced that the course which he is pursuing is so very different from theirs, that both of them cannot have the same termination; and therefore they endeavour to persuade themselves that his religion is hypocrisy, and they call his good conduct folly. At the same time they often attempt to make him odious by some evil name, that they may excuse themselves from adopting his principles, or following his practice. But among us it is, through the goodness of God, a light cross which His children have to bear. Let us not, on that account, relax our diligence or our efforts; or restrain prayer before God; but rather let us ardently pursue our heavenly journey, thankful for the temporal as well as the spiritual blessings which we are permitted to enjoy, while we are sojourners in this world.

But the world is not the only enemy of the believer in Christ. From the effects of the

<sup>78</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 12.

<sup>79</sup> John vii. 7.



opposition of the ungodly he may in some measure hide himself, by avoiding to come in contact with them, or by having no more intercourse than is absolutely necessary with the children of this world. There is a nearer and more subtle foe within him, which is an unceasing source of trouble and anxiety; that is, *the flesh with its affections and lusts*.<sup>80</sup> These *war against his soul*. Here is a fight with one's self; between our earthly passions and desires, and our bounden duty to fulfil the will of God. On this subject the apostle said to the Galatians, *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other*.<sup>81</sup> And to the Romans, *I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members*. This made him exclaim, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*<sup>82</sup> But while he groaned, being burdened with a body of sin and death, he could also add, *I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; or, as he said at another time, Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ,*<sup>83</sup> because he was persuaded

<sup>80</sup> Gal. v. 24. <sup>81</sup> Gal. v. 17. <sup>82</sup> Rom. vii. 21—24. <sup>83</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 57.

that nothing should *be able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

But as the means of preservation from the temptations of the flesh, he found it needful to *continue instant in prayer*; and then it appeared, that Divine *grace was sufficient for him to enable him to resist the power of indwelling sin, and the strength of Christ was made perfect in his weakness*;<sup>84</sup> so that although he was weak in himself, and unable to contend with his internal foes, yet he was *strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might*;<sup>85</sup> in consequence of which they did not prevail against him. The same grace, which enabled the apostle to overcome sin that dwelt in him, is effectual to enable all who diligently seek it to overcome likewise.

There is, however, another enemy by whose means the Christian is exposed to tribulation in this world; and that is, Satan, and the powers of darkness which are confederate with him. The apostle therefore exhorts the Ephesians, *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*<sup>86</sup> The wiles of the devil are such, and his power is so great, that human

<sup>84</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Eph. vi. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Eph. vi. 11, 12.

strength is of itself impotent to oppose him. The apostle Peter encourages the Christian warrior to the combat, by saying, *Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour ; whom resist, stedfast in the faith.*<sup>87</sup> It is only as we *continue instant in prayer* for Divine aid, that we can effectually withstand this powerful and subtle foe. *But the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much* against him. *By praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance,*<sup>88</sup> every assault will be foiled ; because the strength of the Lord will always be manifested in favour of His praying people. Every day while here on earth, we are liable to be assaulted by the wiles or the violence of the enemy of souls, and of those who are under his dominion ; as well as by the corruption of our own hearts, which the devil, by his fiery darts, endeavours to inflame ; but *continuing instant in prayer*, we shall be enabled to overcome them, so that they shall not be permitted to obtain the victory over us. And therefore while we are thus occupied, we may *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*, believing that in a little time our prayer will be turned into praise, and our hope into full fruition.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Peter v. 8.

<sup>88</sup> Eph. vi. 18.

# SERMON XI.

FOR THE

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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CHRISTIAN RETRIBUTION.

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Romans xii. 21.

BE NOT OVERCOME OF EVIL, BUT OVERCOME  
EVIL WITH GOOD.

THESE words conclude the chapter from which our church has taken the Epistles for the first three Sundays after the Epiphany. As the Epiphany means "the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles," this chapter may be supposed to have been selected at this season, for the purpose of showing the superiority of Christian morals to those of the heathen philosophers. It has been asserted by competent judges, that in the whole range of heathen ethics, or the precepts inculcated by the wise philosophers of Greece and Rome, which have been extolled as master-pieces of human wisdom, there is nothing to be met with that will bear a comparison with this

chapter. The morals of the Christian religion are, however, vastly superior, not only in point of intrinsic excellence, but also in not being like those of the pagan sages of antiquity, a baseless fabric. Christianity not only furnishes rules of duty, but also directs us where to obtain strength or ability for the performance of what it enjoins. The belief of the Christian religion not only raises fallen man from the low state to which he has been reduced by sin, and sets before him *the good and the right way*, that he may *walk in it and find rest to his soul*; but also shows him the means whereby he may be enabled to do the will of God. It tells him that since he is unable of himself to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve Him as he ought to do, God will give His special grace to them who call upon Him for it by diligent prayer, to strengthen them for the performance of what He has required of them. The gracious influence of the Holy Spirit is promised, which our heavenly Father will give to all those who are His *children by faith in Christ Jesus*, when they call upon Him. If then we take up the precepts of Christianity in the same manner as any human precepts, with a resolution of living in obedience to them, without seeking Divine grace to enable us to do the will of God, we shall assuredly fail in the attempt. But if we regard them as the commands of the God of love, who has given them to us for our benefit,

in order that by having respect to them, we may be conformed to the image of Him who is the perfection of excellence; and if we implore the grace of His Holy Spirit to enable us to manifest our gratitude for His mercies bestowed upon us, on account of which we owe ourselves to Him; we shall then receive the help of His grace to strengthen us in resisting the temptations of our spiritual enemies, and in walking so as to please Him, and therein to abound more and more. Such a view of moral duty and the means whereby ability to perform it is obtained, were unknown to the heathen world. The service that proceeds from the love of God was one of which they had no idea whatever. We have seen in our consideration of the former part of this chapter, that *the mercies of God*, of which the sinful children of men are partakers through our Lord Jesus Christ, are the exciting cause and the powerful inducement of obedience to His holy and blessed will. The redeeming love of Christ is that which constrains His believing people to live not to themselves, but to Him who died for them and rose again. Let us cultivate in our minds a deeper sense of *the mercies of God* in Christ Jesus, and then we shall be more thankful, and more anxious to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*. It will then appear to be of the utmost importance to us, that we should have respect to all His commandments, and



utterly abhor all false and evil ways. And we shall implore the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit to be vouchsafed us for this purpose.

The first of the precepts contained in the Epistle for this day is, *Be not wise in your own conceits*. We are here warned against setting up our own opinion, and particularly on religious subjects, so as to think meanly of every person who differs from us, as if all others were ignorant in comparison with ourselves. From hence have arisen all the schisms and divisions which have appeared in the church of Christ. Against this spirit the apostle admonishes the Philippians, *Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*<sup>89</sup> It may also condemn a setting up of our own judgment above the word of God; which is done when we do not bow with submission to all that is revealed in the holy scriptures for our instruction and direction. It is our wisdom at all times to *humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*<sup>90</sup> His wisdom is infinite; and what He has been pleased to reveal to us is made known in order that we may be made *wise unto salvation by faith in Christ Jesus*. We should keep this in mind, that we may *receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls.*<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Philip. ii. 3.      <sup>90</sup> 1 Peter v. 5, 6.      <sup>91</sup> James i. 21.

It is by the indulgence of vain speculations on religious subjects, instead of giving *diligence to make our own calling and election sure*, that the spirit of self-conceit is nurtured.

As this spirit is calculated to stir up a feeling of contempt in those who are exposed to its influence, in order that such a feeling may at once be repressed, the apostle exhorts, *Recompense to no man evil for evil*. Christianity is a religion of universal good-will and benevolence. It is contrary to all kinds of malice and wickedness. It permits no resentment to be harboured in the breast, and no injurious treatment of others. It is also open and undisguised in all its conduct. It requires of those who are under its influence to *provide things honest in the sight of all men*. All deceit and dishonesty is contrary to its injunctions. How then can those persons imagine themselves to be Christians who practise them? Yet how many who are called religious persons act in opposition to this precept. What complaints are made of the impositions of tradespeople, and the dishonesty of servants. How those who make a profession of being believers in Christ, can answer it to their own consciences to be guilty of deliberate acts of dishonesty, is unaccountable, except on the principle of self-deception. Dishonest practices are most disgraceful to a profession of Christianity. They occasion religion to be evil spoken of by those who are

ignorant of its principles; and they afford full proof that such persons, though they may have a name that they live, are in truth dead to God, *dead in trespasses and sins*, and have not been quickened to newness of life, however well they may talk on religious subjects.

Again, as the religion of Christ is a religion of peace, the apostle exhorts, *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*. It is very difficult to live peaceably with some people. They are so irritable, so perverse, that they stir up the same evil tempers in all around them; for evil tempers operate like wild fire, inflaming others wherever they appear, *setting on fire the course of nature*, as St. James says.<sup>92</sup> If Christians are placed in such circumstances that it is their duty to live with persons of this unhappy disposition, it becomes them earnestly to seek grace from God, to enable them to submit to the dispensations of His providence, and to profit by them. Let them learn to exercise forbearance; and think how God has borne with their frowardness. If He had been as ready to take offence with us, as we are with each other, what would have become of us? He would long ago have banished us for ever from His blissful presence. But *He is long-suffering toward us*,<sup>93</sup> and therefore it becomes us to bear with our

<sup>92</sup> James iii. 6.

<sup>93</sup> 2 Peter iii. 9.

fellow-creatures, that we may be imitators of Him. Let the suffering children of God be *instant in prayer for patience in tribulation*, and they may be assured that in God's own time He will give them relief; if not in the way which might be most pleasing to themselves, yet in that which will be most for His glory. Let them commit their cause and their way to the Lord, and beseech Him to sanctify their trials, and to wean their attachment from this vain world, and all its concerns; and to *set their affection on things above*. In many cases, people can avoid having intercourse with those who are not peaceably disposed towards them; but there are circumstances in which this cannot easily be done. In such cases it becomes the Christian to cast all his care upon God, and to be assured that His overruling providence will cause all things to work together for good to them that love and fear Him.

The natural desire of the human mind in such circumstances, however, is to be revenged on those who occasion it disquietude and trouble. The apostle therefore says, *Dearlly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*. What an affectionate address is this! It intimates that those *who suffer according to the will of God*<sup>94</sup> are *dearlly beloved* by Him. They are to *give place unto wrath*, to give way before

it, not to oppose it in the same spirit, not to resist or resent it, but to let it have its course, that it may spend itself, and come to an end the sooner. Instead of resenting it, pray for those who indulge these evil dispositions, that the Lord would have mercy upon them, and deliver them from the dominion of the enemy of their souls, who incites them to the exercise of these evil passions. And for yourselves, lay open your trials and troubles to the Lord. Pray that the process may be effected in them, which the apostle describes, that they may prove that *tribulation worketh patience, and patience, experience; and experience, hope*,<sup>95</sup> and then you will enjoy sweet peace and consolation in every trouble to which you may be exposed. Remember also, that whatever you may be called to suffer in this life, you deserve it all as a sinner against God, and ten thousand times more than you can suffer on earth, even everlasting misery in hell. This will make *the sufferings of this present time*<sup>96</sup> appear to be *light afflictions*, however grievous they may seem for the moment; and you will be enabled to look beyond them to the glory which shall be revealed to the children of God in His eternal kingdom.

But further, Christians are to endeavour to return acts of kindness for wrath and injury.

<sup>94</sup> 1 Peter iv. 19.    <sup>95</sup> Romans v. 34.    <sup>96</sup> Romans viii. 18.

*Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*<sup>97</sup> This may touch his heart, may consume his wrath, while revenge will only increase it. It is said that coals are heaped on the head of a crucible for the melting of metals, and that from thence the idea is taken ; and therefore it means that you will melt his heart, and soften his feelings, and remove his enmity, by acts of kindness and benevolence.

The apostle concludes in the words of the text, *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* Be not induced to return evil for evil, but endeavour to return good for evil. The former will be to your own injury, the latter will turn the misconduct of others to your benefit. This is the surest way of vanquishing an adversary without being injured ourselves.

But let us consider the text in a more extensive sense than as relating to the evil conduct of others. Let us view the precept as applicable to sin in general. This is truly the greatest of evils, on account of which *the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.*<sup>98</sup> From this general evil all particular evils follow in its train. It has brought into the world all the diseases and pains to which mankind are subject,

<sup>97</sup> Proverbs xxv. 21, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Romans viii. 22.



and death itself, the most tremendous of them all. Did we look upon sin as the cause and the forerunner of death, what a different aspect would it bear in our view from that which it usually does. Could we behold, together with the pleasing temptation, the deadly poison which is mixed up with it, though concealed, we should dread the commission of that which has such fatal consequences attending it. We naturally wish to avoid danger, but who takes equal pains to avoid sin? What an infatuation must there be in that which deceives the whole human race? Who that knows himself, does not lament the influence which sin holds over him, and his liability to fall into its snares? The proneness of mankind to do that which is displeasing to God, or which He has forbidden, affords a full proof of our fallen state, that we are not in the state of uprightness in which man was created. It is because men are *overcome of evil*, are the slaves of sin, are led aside by the enticements of the flesh, by the snares of the world, and by the suggestions of the devil, that they seek happiness independently of God, that their affections are set on other objects more than on Him in whom *we live, and move, and have our being*.<sup>99</sup> But the example of numbers in the commission of sin, will not excuse or prevent the punishment

<sup>99</sup> Acts xvii. 28.<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxiii. 2.<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 32.

of the workers of iniquity. It is therefore commanded, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*<sup>1</sup> Those who are overcome by the evil of the world, will be *condemned with the world.*<sup>2</sup> The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha is held forth as a warning or *ensample to those that after should live ungodly,*<sup>3</sup> that sin will not go unpunished. It is on account of sin that the world and all things therein will be burnt up. The openly avowed wickedness that there is in the world, the hardened impiety which some manifest, is a proof of the power which Satan exercises. We have need to *watch and pray that we enter not into temptation,*<sup>4</sup> that our spiritual enemies may not obtain the advantage over us to the destruction of our peace, and if Divine grace prevent not, to the eternal ruin and loss of our souls. Let us take unto ourselves, and *put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance;*<sup>5</sup> and then we shall find that *Divine strength will be made perfect in our weakness,*<sup>6</sup> and we shall be preserved from the evil which dwells in our hearts, and by temptations to which we are surrounded on every side. Let us remember that it is because we are sinners, that we are exposed to suffering and pain, to

<sup>3</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 6. <sup>4</sup> Mat. xxvi. 41. <sup>5</sup> Eph. vi. 11, 18. <sup>6</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9.

affliction and trouble, to various calamities in this life, to the death of the body, and to eternal death hereafter; and this will convince us that sin can be no light evil, when it brings such miseries in its train. Were there no sin there would be no death. As long, therefore, as we see people dying around us, there is full and sufficient evidence afforded of the displeasure of God against sin; and we have reason to fear being overcome of this evil, lest the dreadful consequences of sin in eternity should be our portion; which must be the case of all who die in their sins. If we are the children of God, we shall dread being overcome by the evil of sin, because it is displeasing to God, and on account of it His *wrath cometh on the children of disobedience.*<sup>7</sup> And we shall also endeavour not to return evil for evil to those who have injured or opposed us. We shall not revenge ourselves of them, because it is contrary to the will of our heavenly Father that His children should manifest such evil dispositions. And we shall beware of all sin, and watch against it, praying earnestly that we may not at any time be overcome by the world, the flesh, or the devil, our spiritual enemies, whose dominion over us was renounced in our name at our baptism, and whom we must *resist, stedfast in the faith,*<sup>8</sup> all the days of our life, if we would obtain the

<sup>7</sup> Colossians iii. 6.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter v. 9.

salvation of God, or be admitted into His eternal kingdom and glory.

But the apostle exhorts us in the text, not only to avoid being *overcome of evil*; but, further, to *overcome evil with good*; or to endeavour to show kindness in return for unkindness; and not to harbour resentment even against those who may do us injury, but to be ready to do them any good offices in our power. How delightful is it to see Christian principle rising superior to the maxims of the world, and the feelings of our selfish nature; and exercising benevolence towards those who have proved themselves unworthy of it. Such an example has been set before us by our blessed Lord, *who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not;*<sup>9</sup> but instead of acting in the manner in which we should naturally be disposed to act, He prayed for His murderers, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*<sup>10</sup> And, further, He Himself *died for the ungodly*, so that, *when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*<sup>11</sup> Never was such an example of love to enemies before manifested. Let us endeavour in some measure to imitate it, in all that we may be called to endure from others. And let us *overcome evil with good* also, by showing in all our conduct the superiority of the

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter ii. 23.    <sup>10</sup> Luke xxiii. 34.    <sup>11</sup> Romans v. 6, 10.

principles which are inculcated by the religion of Christ, to the maxims and deeds of the world. Let us endeavour to do all the good in our power to those around us, both to their bodies and their souls; exhibiting the life and influence of Christianity, not only by our words and outward profession, but in all our walk and conduct; *that with well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; for so is the will of God*<sup>12</sup> concerning His people. Did those who make a more than ordinary profession of religion thus *shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*,<sup>13</sup> it would assuredly advance the glory of our Redeemer, who has commanded His disciples, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*.<sup>14</sup> This is the way to *overcome evil with good*, to counteract the influence which sin possesses over our own minds, and those of others. Oh! that all who *name the name of Christ* may learn thus to *depart from all iniquity*;<sup>15</sup> that the misconduct of those who profess to believe the gospel of Christ, might no longer be a stumbling-block to others, and afford them a pretence for refusing to attend to the admonitions of the word of God, and the salvation of their own souls.

In reviewing the subject before us, we have

<sup>12</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 15. <sup>13</sup> Phil. ii. 15, 16. <sup>14</sup> Mat. v. 16. <sup>15</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 19.



seen what Christianity enjoins on those who profess to believe its saving truths. Let us bring the matter home to our own consciences, and ask ourselves, Are we *overcome of evil*, or do we *overcome evil with good*? It has been shown what is meant by being *overcome of evil*; that it consists especially in living in malice and envy, hatred and revenge: or in conformity to the corrupt maxims and evil practices of the world that lieth in wickedness; in obedience to the natural *desires of the flesh and of the mind*, and to the temptations of Satan, the adversary of God and man. This is the state of all who do not deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Christ. If we are not partakers of a living faith in the Son of God, the great motive for obedience which the apostle brings forward in the beginning of this chapter can have no influence over us; our minds cannot have been impressed with *the mercies of God*, in the gift of His beloved Son to be our Redeemer; and we can have no real desire that the Spirit of God should be our Sanctifier, to conform us to the mind and will of God in all things. Let us then ask ourselves, What is our state before God? Are we reconciled to Him? Are we at peace with Him? Have we a good hope that our sins are forgiven us for Christ's sake? Are we anxious to ascertain this, or have we ascertained it? If the God of heaven be our Father, we shall endeavour to



live as His children. If we are *washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God,*<sup>16</sup> we shall, like those who are *redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,*<sup>17</sup> *glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's.*<sup>16</sup> It is needful, therefore, to *examine ourselves* impartially by the word of God, not only *whether we be in the faith,*<sup>18</sup> or whether we believe the gospel of Christ; but also what are the dispositions of our minds, and what is the practice of our lives. If the Lord Jesus Christ be our hope for the pardon of our sins, and reconciliation with God, and the enjoyment of His favour, we shall also implore the Spirit of grace to enable us to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;*<sup>19</sup> we shall *abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good,* before both God and man. We shall dread being *overcome of evil.* We shall endeavour to *overcome evil with good,* both in regard to others and to ourselves. Let us then take the word of God for our directory, and pray that Divine grace may be vouchsafed to us, in order that we *may be enabled to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things,*<sup>19</sup> to His glory and our comfort.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11, 20. <sup>17</sup> 1 Pet. i. 19. <sup>18</sup> 2 Cor. xiii. 5. <sup>19</sup> Tit. ii. 12, 10.

## SERMON XII.

FOR THE

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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DUTY TO RULERS.

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Romans xiii. 7.

RENDER THEREFORE TO ALL THEIR DUES ;  
TRIBUTE TO WHOM TRIBUTE IS DUE ; CUS-  
TOM TO WHOM CUSTOM ; FEAR TO WHOM  
FEAR ; HONOUR TO WHOM HONOUR.

THE superior excellence of Christian morals to any which had been taught in the Gentile world, having been shown in the Epistles for the three first Sundays after the Epiphany, the apostle proceeds in the Epistle for this day, to inculcate the duty of professors of Christianity towards the rulers and magistrates of this world. A charge was made against our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor, that He had disregarded this duty. His enemies declared, *We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cesar.*<sup>20</sup> In like manner the apostles of Christ were ac-

cused as those that had *turned the world upside down, and did contrary to the decrees of Cesar.*<sup>21</sup>

For the purpose of showing Christians that they were to avoid giving just occasion to accusations of this description, although they would be falsely charged with them by their enemies, the apostle Paul thought it needful to give very particular directions respecting the line of conduct they were to pursue, as members of society, in the community to which they belonged, whether by birth or by abode. He says, *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.* So likewise he directed Titus, as a minister of Christ, when addressing Christians, to *put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates.*<sup>22</sup> In like manner St. Peter exhorted those to whom he wrote, *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.*<sup>23</sup>

The reason why the children of God in particular are to be subject to the constituted authorities of the land in which they live, is, *For there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God.* This is a sufficient con-

<sup>20</sup> Luke xxiii. 2. <sup>21</sup> Acts xvii. 6, 7. <sup>22</sup> Titus iii. 1. <sup>23</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 13—15.

sideration to induce those who regard the God of heaven as their Father, in the most endearing sense of the word, to submit to civil government with the utmost cordiality and cheerfulness, and not to countenance any thing that is opposed to the good order of society. Those who are placed in the highest stations occupy them by Divine permission, and indeed by the appointment of the overruling providence of God ; however contrary to His will in many instances they may act. His word declares, *By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice.*<sup>24</sup>

It follows of course that, *Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.* To rebel against the constituted authorities of the country in which we live, is an act of rebellion against God. *And they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.* They oppose that which is Divinely appointed, and are to be condemned for so doing ; and they will be justly condemned, if they are found guilty of resisting the established government of their country. *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.* It is for the purpose of maintaining good order in society that rulers are appointed ; it is their business to *justify the righteous, and to condemn the wicked.*<sup>25</sup> They are to be a terror to evil doers.

<sup>24</sup> Proverbs viii. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy xxv. 3.

The question is therefore asked, *Wilt thou not be afraid of the power?* Wouldest thou be without any occasion of fearing the displeasure of those who are in authority? An answer is given, *Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good.* This is the object proposed by the exercise of authority, to promote the welfare of those who are in subjection to it; and to protect the quiet and peaceably disposed from the machinations of the disorderly and wicked.

It is added, on the other hand, *If thou do that which is evil be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* He is to make use of the sword for the punishment of evil doers, and the protection of them that do well. It is from thence inferred, *Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake;* not only for fear of punishment, but also from a principle of regard to the authority of God, who has appointed magistrates to act for the promotion of good order in society. How dreadful must be the state of things in a community which has no regular government. When an account is given of the commission of the most atrocious deeds, they are said to have occurred, because *in those days there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own*

*eyes.*<sup>26</sup> In such cases, might usually overcomes right. But in a well-regulated community, the weakest is protected as well as the strongest, the poor as well as the rich; those only who would create confusion and disturbance, and inflict misery upon their fellow-subjects, are repressed and discouraged.

It is therefore the duty as well as the interest of all good members of society to uphold and support the government of the country in which they live. And it is our interest to do so, on account of the benefits which are derived from it. *For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* They act as the ministers and servants of God, while they devote their time and their talents to the benefit of the common wealth, to the protection and encouragement of the good, and to the discouragement and punishment of the wicked, whom they prevent from doing injury to their fellow-creatures.

The apostle speaks here altogether of the purpose for which magistrates are appointed, in order that rulers may learn their duty, and the reason why power is entrusted to them; and that subjects may be thankful for the protection which is afforded to them by means of this

<sup>26</sup> Judges xxi. 25.



Divine appointment; which hinders wicked men from accomplishing their evil purposes, to the disorganisation and misery of the community. In order that the constituted authorities of the country may be supported, he exhorts Christians in the text, *Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.* We may consider these words,

*First*, As they relate to earthly governors; and

*Secondly*, In reference to our duty towards the Supreme Governor of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

*First*, It is the duty of those who profess to be the children of God, to pay the taxes imposed by the government of the country in which they live. Taxes are here called *dues* or debts; with regard to which it is said immediately afterwards, *Owe no man any thing.* *Tribute and custom* are supposed to denote the different kinds of taxes; the first, what are called direct taxes, on property or land; and the latter, those which are laid on goods or merchandise. The duties imposed by lawful authority are debts due to the government, which are to be paid honestly. The benefit derived from a regular government, the security to person and property which is enjoyed in consequence of it, is well worth the money paid for its support, and therefore it should be paid cheerfully. It may seem to

be a hardship in some cases to be required to pay these dues ; but it is for the general advantage of the community that order and regularity should be observed in it ; which would not be the case if there were no persons in authority.

But not only are tribute and custom to be paid ; the persons who fill stations of authority are to be regarded with *fear*, to be treated with reverence and respect ; they are to have *honour* given to them, they are to be held in estimation for the sake of the office which they sustain. We are to *render fear to whom fear is due ; honour to whom honour*. God has placed men in different ranks in society, for the benefit of the whole. And we find throughout the scriptures that honour is constantly given by His command to those who are in stations of eminence. He says, *My son, fear thou the Lord, and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change.*<sup>27</sup> And again, *Curse not the king, no not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber.*<sup>28</sup>

In the second table of the moral law, we are taught how we are to *render to all their dues* in this world, or our duty towards our neighbour. The first of the precepts on this subject is to honour our parents or superiors, who are placed in stations of authority over us ; and this precept is called by the apostle, *The first commandment with*

<sup>27</sup> Proverbs xxiv. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Ecclesiastes x. 20.

*promise.*<sup>29</sup> For of this commandment it is said, as the consequence of obedience to it, *that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee;*<sup>30</sup> or as the apostle terms it, *that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long upon the earth.*<sup>31</sup> The promise of temporal prosperity, then, is made by God to those who *render to all their dues*, who “love, honour, and succour their father and mother; who honour and obey the king, and all that are put in authority under him; who submit themselves to all their governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; who order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters;” and thus *render fear to whom fear is due, honour to whom honour.* In the subsequent precepts of the moral law, we are taught to *render to all their dues*, by refraining from doing injury to them in their persons, in their relative capacities, in their property, and in their good name; and not only refraining from the act, but even from the desire to commit it; or as these precepts are explained in our Catechism; “to hurt no body by word or deed; to be true and just in all our dealings; to bear no malice nor hatred in our hearts; to keep our hands from picking and stealing, and our tongues from evil speaking, lying and slandering; to keep our bodies in temperance, soberness, and chas-

<sup>29</sup> Eph. vi. 2.    <sup>30</sup> Exodus xx. 12.    <sup>31</sup> Ephesians vi. 3.

tity ; not to covet nor desire other men's goods ; but to learn and labour truly to get our own living, and to do our duty in that state of life in which it hath pleased God to place us." Such is the manner in which we are to *render to all their dues*, among our fellow-creatures, and to *owe no man any thing*. May we all of us be enabled by Divine grace thus to fulfil the duties of our calling in life, to the glory of God, and our own comfort, happiness, and prosperity. But we may consider the subject before us,

*Secondly*, In reference to our duty to the Supreme Governor of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords. How great is our debt of obligation to Him. It becomes us to render to Him according to His benefits done unto us ; to pay Him the debt of love and gratitude and obedience which we owe to Him. And here we are required,

*First, To honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first fruits of all our increase.*<sup>32</sup> This is the tribute which we owe to Him ; to give Him of His own, for the promotion of His glory. As those who *are not our own, but who are bought with a price, we are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits which are His.*<sup>33</sup> We are to give *our ourselves first to the Lord, and then to administer of our abundance to the glory of the same Lord* ; re-

<sup>32</sup> Prov. iii. 9.    <sup>33</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.    <sup>34</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 5, 19—21.

membering at the same time that we are to provide *for honest things not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*<sup>34</sup> We are to seek how we may best further His cause in the world by the use of the property which He has entrusted to us; as well as by the influence which He has given us over those with whom we are connected in society.

We are required also to *render to Him fear. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do thereafter; the praise of it endureth for ever.*<sup>35</sup> The fear which is to be rendered to Him is not that which arises from the dread of His wrath and displeasure; but from love produced by His goodness and mercy, of which we are continually partakers. It is the fear which a dutiful child has for a kind and tender parent; a fear to offend One to whom we are deeply indebted. It is said of the first Christians that they walked *in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*<sup>36</sup> This fear is the result of *the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*<sup>37</sup> And the love of God thus affects our hearts when we behold the manner in which it was displayed in the gift of His beloved Son to be our Redeemer. *For in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only*

<sup>35</sup> Psalm cxi. 10.<sup>36</sup> Acts ix. 31.<sup>37</sup> Romans v. 5.

*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. When this love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, we love Him because He first loved us.*<sup>38</sup> And when we love Him truly, we fear to displease Him by walking contrary to Him, or doing any thing that He has forbidden us to do in His holy word. He has graciously promised respecting His people, *I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them and of their children after them; and 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 into their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.*<sup>39</sup> Let it be our prayer that He would be pleased to fulfil this promise to us, that we may render *fear to Him to whom it is eminently due*, that we may fear before Him all the days of our lives.

We are also required to render *honour to whom honour is due*; or “to honour God’s holy name and His word, and to serve Him truly” day by day continually. We are to honour Him by acknowledging Him to be our Lord and God, whose commands it is our duty to obey at all times; not being ashamed to declare that *we ought to*

<sup>38</sup> 1 John iv. 9, 10, 19.   <sup>39</sup> Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.   <sup>40</sup> Acts v. 29.



*obey God rather than men.*<sup>40</sup> We are to worship Him with supreme affection; to worship the Lord our God, and serve Him only; coming to Him as children to their father, in humility and simplicity and singleness of heart, *in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make known our requests at His footstool, through Christ Jesus.*<sup>41</sup> We are not to seek *grace to help in time of need* from any other quarter. We are to acknowledge no other Mediator but the *one Mediator between God and men, the God-man Christ Jesus,*<sup>42</sup> who became *Emmanuel, God with us*, that He might be our Mediator and Redeemer; our High Priest who *ever liveth to make intercession for them that come unto God by Him.*<sup>43</sup>

The first commandment forbids all worship being paid to any inferior beings as to God; all setting up of mediators to intercede with Him on our behalf. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*<sup>44</sup> We can have no spiritual intercourse with any other being whatever. We can have no communion with angels or departed spirits. They cannot help us in our approach to God. They are not every where present, and therefore if we call upon them they cannot hear our supplications. God alone fills heaven and earth with His presence. *The worshipping of angels*

<sup>41</sup> Phil. iv. 6.   <sup>42</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 5.   <sup>43</sup> Heb. vii. 25.   <sup>44</sup> John iv. 24.

is termed by the apostle *intruding into those things which we have not seen*, or of which we know nothing; and is the result of being *vainly puffed up by a fleshly mind*. Those who do this are *not holding the Head*, are none of His; and they will be *beguiled of their reward*, or cheated out of heaven, by their *voluntary humility*;<sup>45</sup> by humbling themselves before their fellow-creatures in a manner not required of them by God; or rather in opposition to His will, who demands the homage of His creatures to be paid to Himself alone.

It is, then, the most arrogant impiety, whatever pretence of humility may be made, to pray to, or to seek the intercession of angels or departed saints, the virgin Mary, or the apostles of Christ, or any other departed spirits, as the church of Rome teaches her deluded votaries to do. The angels, or the saints in heaven, regard not such worshippers; and have no communication with them. Their worship is of no more avail than that which was offered by the impious Israelites to Baal, who cried *from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us; but there was no voice, nor any that answered*.<sup>46</sup> It is as abominable as the worship offered to *the sun, and the moon, and the stars, or all the host of heaven*,<sup>47</sup> which was expressly forbidden, as well as image worship, which the second commandment con-

<sup>45</sup> Col. ii. 18, 19.    <sup>46</sup> 1 Kings xix. 26.    <sup>47</sup> Deut. iv. 19.

demns; and is justly termed idolatry, or the worship of representatives of the Deity, instead of that of the one living and true God Himself.

Idolatry of every kind has a tendency to debase the mind, and to banish from it the idea of the invisible God, who is every where present, who sees and knows all things, and searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men. As it cuts off mankind from communion of spirit with the Father of spirits, it necessarily cuts them off also from everlasting salvation. All *the true worshippers* of God, whose worship is accepted by Him, *worship the Father in spirit and in truth,*<sup>48</sup> through the mediation of His only begotten Son, the Redeemer of mankind. All other worship of God is vain, and to no purpose. He is a jealous God, and will not give His honour to graven images, nor to any other representatives or intercessors whom the folly of men may set up, with the view of worshipping Him more in accordance with their own ideas of what is becoming with regard to Him. He has been pleased to give to mankind the revelation of His will in the holy scriptures, and those who set aside the word of God to follow their own fancies or imaginations, will find that *whoso despiseth the commandment shall be destroyed.*<sup>49</sup>

As God is not to be dishonoured by the worship

<sup>48</sup> John iv. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Proverbs xiii. 13.

of created beings, nor by image worship; so He is to be honoured by the reverence which is to be paid to His *glorious and fearful name*.<sup>50</sup> His name is not to be taken in vain, or made use of in an impious or irreverent manner. With what awe is His name regarded in heaven, by those who surround His throne in glory. The same reverence should be manifested by the children of men on earth. Those who love Him, will honour His name, and not profane it; they will *speak good of His name*,<sup>51</sup> and not desecrate it. It is dreadful to hear ungodly men taking this holy name into their profane lips, and making use of it to enforce their oaths and execrations. *The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain*,<sup>52</sup> or who pollutes it to base and impious purposes.

He demands honour from His creatures likewise, by a due observance of the sacred day of holy rest which He has enjoined, in commemoration of the blessings which He has bestowed upon us both by creation and redemption. Those who render honour to Him, will *keep His sabbaths and reverence His sanctuary*.<sup>53</sup> While they serve Him day by day, they will devote one day in seven more particularly to His service, by making a public acknowledgment on this holy day of the obligations under which they feel themselves to lie

<sup>50</sup> Deut. xxviii. 58. <sup>51</sup> Ps. c. 3. <sup>52</sup> Exod. xx. 7. <sup>53</sup> Lev. xix. 30.

to Him, in consequence of His benefits conferred upon them; and also a profession that their hopes are directed to the *rest*, or keeping of a sabbath, which *remaineth for the people of God*<sup>54</sup> in His eternal kingdom and glory.

Let us thus *render honour to Him to whom honour is due*; remembering that our "duty towards God is to believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength; to worship Him, to give Him thanks, to put our whole trust in Him, to call upon Him, to honour His holy name, and His word, and to serve Him truly all the days of our life." Thus honouring Him here on earth, it will be our privilege, since He has promised, *Them that honour Me, I will honour*,<sup>55</sup> to look forward in hope that we shall receive the honour of which all His saints will partake in His eternal kingdom and glory. That this blessedness may be vouchsafed to us, may God of His infinite mercy grant, for Christ's sake: To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory ascribed, now and for ever. Amen.

<sup>54</sup> Hebrews iv. 9.

<sup>55</sup> 1 Samuel ii. 30.

## SERMON XIII.

FOR THE

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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CHRISTIAN MOTIVES.

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Colossians iii. 17.

AND WHATSOEVER YE DO IN WORD OR DEED,  
DO ALL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS,  
GIVING THANKS TO GOD AND THE FATHER  
BY HIM.

To show the superiority of Christianity in its principles and precepts to every thing that had before been exhibited to the world, is the object which appears to have been proposed by the selection of Epistles for the Sundays after the Epiphany. In that which is appointed for this day, believers in Christ are addressed under the characters of *the elect of God, holy and beloved*, and are exhorted to manifest in their dispositions and behaviour a conduct suitable to these characters. The first of these characteristics of the



children of God, is one which is viewed with peculiar jealousy by the people of the world; who, although their minds are set on earthly things, yet cannot endure that others should be more the favourites of heaven, as they term it, than themselves. But that God has a chosen people among mankind, whom He has formed for Himself to show forth His praise, is the uniform testimony of the holy scriptures. And that there is a distinction made *between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not,*<sup>56</sup> has been evident from the days of Cain and Abel. Thus, after the flood, Abraham was selected by Divine grace to be the friend of God, and the depository of His blessings to the world, when all around him had fallen into idolatry; and his posterity were made the peculiar people of God for many ages, while the whole world had sunk into the grossest ignorance of God and disobedience to His laws, so as to *work all uncleanness with greediness,*<sup>57</sup> being *dead in trespasses and sins.*

When the religion of Christ was made known to the Gentiles, and they were invited to partake of its blessings, those who embraced it were denominated *the elect people of God.* The apostle Paul says to the Christians at Ephesus: *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*

<sup>56</sup> Malachi iii. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Ephesians iv. 19.

*hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having 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 Beloved.*<sup>58</sup> St. Peter addresses his first epistle to those who were *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*<sup>59</sup> So our Saviour said to His disciples, *Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit.*<sup>60</sup> Believers in Christ are spoken of as *the elect of God*, in order to promote their humiliation, and self-abasement before Him, since it is not on account of any merit of theirs, but of His own grace that He has chosen them to be His people; and to fill them with gratitude and love to Him who has shown His mercy to His undeserving creatures.

When this characteristic of the people of God is mentioned, it is always in connection with holiness. *The elect of God are holy persons.* As Moses said to the Israelites, *Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself*

<sup>58</sup> Eph. i. 4—6.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Peter i. 2.

<sup>60</sup> John xv. 16.

*above all people that are upon the face of the earth.*<sup>61</sup> So the apostle Peter said to believers in Christ, *Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.*<sup>62</sup> As such, *they follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*<sup>63</sup> *As He which hath called them is holy, so are they to be holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am Holy.*<sup>64</sup> It is their prayer to the God of peace, the Lord the Spirit, that He would *sanctify them wholly; that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>65</sup>

They are also *beloved of God*. He has loved them in Christ Jesus *with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving kindness has drawn*<sup>66</sup> them to Himself, to believe in His name, and to put their trust in His mercy. Such are the characteristics of the people of God. They are made known in the word of God in order to lead us to self-examination. If we are numbered among the elect people of God, we shall be humble from a sense of our unworthiness, and thankful for His goodness to us. We shall also be holy persons, who deny *ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present*

<sup>61</sup> Deut. vii. 6. <sup>62</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 9. <sup>63</sup> Heb. xii. 14. <sup>64</sup> 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

*world.*<sup>67</sup> If we are *beloved* of God, we shall manifest our love to Him for, *the great love wherewith He hath loved us*, by living in obedience to His holy will and commandments, and walking in the same all the days of our life.

The conduct which is required of the children of God who are chosen by His grace, set apart to His service, and partakers of His loving kindness, is stated by the apostle. He exhorts them, *Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* The graces of the Christian character are termed by the apostle in his epistle to the Galatians, *the fruit of the Spirit.*<sup>68</sup> They do not grow in nature's soil. They are produced by the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of His people. There is indeed a kind of imitation of them to be found in the world, which is occasioned by various external circumstances; in some cases, by the discipline of good education, and the influence of good example; and sometimes by means of a course of severe affliction, united with what is called an amiable disposition. These things will lead some people to be compassionate, kind, humble,

<sup>65</sup> 1 Thess. v. 23. <sup>66</sup> Jer. xxxi. 3. <sup>67</sup> Titus ii. 12. <sup>68</sup> Gal. v. 22.

meeke, patient, and to forgive injuries. But Christian graces far surpass all moral virtues. They are derived from a higher source, even from love to God; and they propose to themselves a nobler end, the glory of God. Love to God is the first fruit of the Spirit, and the rest of these graces follow in its train; for love produces a desire of entire and unreserved obedience to the will of God, as it is revealed in His holy word. And when the Christian is required, *Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*; he cannot but forgive those against whom he has cause of complaint, however great the fault, however unreasonable the quarrel, on the part of his adversary. The debt of gratitude which he owes for the redeeming grace and dying love of Christ is so incalculably great, that he is deeply sensible nothing can be required of him in return with which it is not his bounden duty to comply. He knows that he owes unto the Lord Jesus even his own self besides, and therefore he is under irresistible obligation not only to forgive a penitent brother who has offended or wronged him, but to love him also; as the apostle adds, *And above all these things put on charity, or love, which is the bond of perfectness.* Christians are to *walk in love, as Christ also hath loved*<sup>69</sup> them. The love of Christ is a bond of

<sup>69</sup> Ephesians v. 2.

union such as nature cannot supply; it produces love to Him, and to all the members of His mystical body. It constrains to the exercise of all Christian graces, with regard to the family and household of faith most especially, but also towards all mankind.

This love is to be accompanied with peace. *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.* The apostle was anxious that believers in Christ should *endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,*<sup>70</sup> that those who were one with Christ, and one body in consequence of union with Him, should live in peace with each other; that there should be no divisions among them; but they should show to the world that they were *all one in Christ Jesus.*<sup>71</sup> In order to this, *the peace of God must rule in the heart.* We must *have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*<sup>72</sup> by faith in Him, believing that He hath *made peace by the blood of His cross,*<sup>73</sup> and that in consequence of His sacrifice for sin those who rely upon it for pardon and reconciliation with God are at peace with Him. Those who have this peace of God in their consciences will *follow peace with all men.*<sup>74</sup> This peace will *rule in their hearts,* it will influence their affections, and their actions will be governed by it,

<sup>70</sup> Eph. iv. 3.    <sup>71</sup> Gal. iii. 21.    <sup>72</sup> Rom. v. 1.    <sup>73</sup> Col. i. 20



so that *the peaceable fruit of righteousness*<sup>74</sup> will be produced by them *to the glory and praise of God*.<sup>75</sup> A thankful spirit for Divine goodness will be manifested; gratitude for mercies received will fill the heart, overflow from the lips, and be evinced in the life and conduct.

In order to the production of all this fruit of the Spirit, the apostle exhorts to an intimate acquaintance with the holy scriptures, in which the whole will of God respecting man is made known. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* The word of Christ is the testimony concerning Him and His great salvation, which it is the object of the scriptures of truth from the beginning to the end to make known; from the first promise of His coming as the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head, to the last promise of His second coming to accomplish all that is written of Him in the everlasting salvation of His redeemed. This *word of Christ* is to *dwell in* His people, their minds are to be informed and instructed by it. It is to *dwell in* them *richly* or abundantly; its Divine truths, its doctrines and precepts, its admonitions and exhortations, are to sink deep into their hearts, to be received with

<sup>74</sup> Hebrews xii. 14, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Philippians i. 11.

pure affection. Believers in Christ, are to “mark, learn, and inwardly digest” His holy word, that thereby they may be made *wise unto salvation*, which is the highest wisdom, and may enjoy that consolation which the belief of it is designed to convey to the soul. It is supposed that by *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, the apostle referred to the different kinds of composition contained in what we now call the book of Psalms; that while the name *psalms* characterises the book in general, that of *hymns* applies to those which begin or end with *Hallelujah* or *Praise the Lord*;<sup>76</sup> and *spiritual songs* to those which are entitled *songs of degrees*.<sup>77</sup> From all of them instruction and admonition are to be received, which are continually needful for us. And this is obtained in the most pleasing manner, when they are sung or recited *with grace in the heart to the Lord*; under the influence of the Holy Spirit, while He tunes the heart to join in the high praises of God which are uttered with the mouth. This singing is to be an expression of our happiness and joy in the Lord. The apostle James says, *Is any merry? let him sing psalms*.<sup>78</sup> It is an anticipation of the blessed employment of those who see the face God in the beatific vision of His glory, and sing His praises with joy unspeakable in His blissful presence. Let us then comply with this

<sup>76</sup> As Ps. cxi, cxii, cxiii.    <sup>77</sup> Ps. cxx. to cxxxiv.    <sup>78</sup> James v. 13.

exhortation, as well as those which have preceded it, to the glory of God, and the consolation and joy of our souls.

The Epistle for this day closes with another important direction, to which our attention is now to be paid more particularly. *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.* From these words we may consider,

*First,* The general direction which the apostle gives for the rule of our conduct.

*Secondly,* The reason why it is given, and

*Thirdly,* The means whereby it is to be followed.

*First,* The direction is, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.* This applies both to our words and our actions. In the regulation of both we are to consider the obligations under which we lie to our Lord Jesus Christ, and what He has commanded us to observe and to do. The Psalmist prayed, *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer;*<sup>79</sup> and at another time, *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.*<sup>80</sup> It becomes those who profess to be the people of God, to be careful that *no corrupt communication proceed out of their mouth, but that*

<sup>79</sup> Psalm xix. 14.

<sup>80</sup> Psalm cxli. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Eph. iv. 29.

*which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers;*<sup>81</sup> and for this purpose, *to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom, that their speech may be alway with grace, seasoned with salt,*<sup>82</sup> or savoury and profitable to those who hear it. Our Saviour solemnly declared, *I say unto you, that every idle, or evil, word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*<sup>83</sup> How careful then does it become His people to be continually with regard to the words which they speak, that they may not mislead others or bring condemnation upon themselves. Corrupting speech is however that which seems to be particularly intended, that which may do injury to the souls of those who hear it. All evil speaking and falsehood however are to be avoided as well as filthy communication; and together with these things the persons who make use of them. Christians are to give no countenance to any thing of the kind; but as the wise man advises, *to go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.*<sup>84</sup> And they are to be careful for themselves that they give no occasion to wicked men to speak evil of the ways of God by any unbecoming speeches of their own; remembering

<sup>82</sup> Col. iii. 16; iv. 6.   <sup>83</sup> Matt. xii. 36, 37.   <sup>84</sup> Prov. xiv. 7.

that the Lord Jesus requires of those who are called by His name to speak on all occasions the words of truth and soberness.

And as the words which we speak, so likewise the actions which we perform are to be such as are pleasing to Him, that our *conversation*, or conduct in life, may be such as *becometh the gospel of Christ*. Those who profess and call themselves Christians are thus to look to their words and to their actions; or as the apostle directed Titus to *affirm constantly, They which have believed in God must be careful to maintain good works, because these things are good and profitable unto men.*<sup>85</sup> They are, as our Saviour exhorted His disciples, to *let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven.*<sup>86</sup> They are to *do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*; their words and their actions are to manifest their obedience to His holy will and commandments, and the gratitude which they feel to Him whose name they bear. To *do all in His name*, is to act altogether in obedience to His command, and in submission to His authority, or as He hath in His holy word willed and commanded to be done. If *the word of Christ* be thus *a lamp to our feet and a light to our path,*<sup>87</sup> we shall go on our way safely, and our feet will not stumble. We shall

<sup>85</sup> Titus iii. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Matt. v. 16.

<sup>87</sup> Ps. cxix. 105.

speaking good of His name; the promotion of His honour and glory will be our end and aim; and we shall do that which is pleasing in His sight.

The reason why we are to act in this manner is,

*Secondly*, Because of the obligations we are under to our Lord Jesus Christ for His redeeming love. What do we owe to Him for having come into the world to save sinners; or because, as He said Himself, the *Son of man* came to seek and to save that which is lost.<sup>88</sup> We were lost to God, in danger of perishing everlastingly, but Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth to be our Redeemer and Saviour, to suffer for our sins, to bleed and die for us, that in Him we might have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace.<sup>89</sup> He came to fulfil all righteousness for us in His own sacred person, that by the obedience of One many might be made righteous.<sup>90</sup> We are told that *Christ hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour;*<sup>91</sup> and therefore we are called upon to love Him, because He first loved us,<sup>92</sup> and to devote ourselves to His service, that we may live to His glory and show forth His praise, as those who are not our own, but are bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;<sup>93</sup> and there-

<sup>88</sup> Luke xix. 10. <sup>89</sup> Eph. i. 7. <sup>90</sup> Rom. v. 19. <sup>91</sup> Eph. v. 4.



*fore should glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's.*<sup>94</sup> The language of our hearts should ever be, What has Christ done for us! What love ought we to manifest to Him for it, what gratitude, what obedience! There is nothing but the consideration of the great love wherewith the Lord Jesus Christ hath loved us, that will produce this effect; there is nothing else that will cause universal obedience to His holy will and commandments in word and in deed. But if we have an abiding sense of the love of Christ, it will constrain us, because as the apostle argues, *we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again;*<sup>95</sup> *who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.*

The means whereby this disposition of mind is to be cultivated by those who partake of these benefits from the Lord Jesus, is the

*Third* thing to be noticed. They are to be *giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.* As through Him they are reconciled to God, they are *by Him*, as their Mediator and Advocate, who *ever liveth to make intercession for them, to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, the fruit of their lips, giving thanks to His name.*<sup>96</sup> They

<sup>92</sup> 1 John iv. 19. <sup>93</sup> 1 Pet. i. 19. <sup>94</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20. <sup>95</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14.

are to be the thankful children of their heavenly Father, *the God of all grace, who hath called them to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus.*<sup>97</sup> It is because He is *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that He acknowledges Himself to be the Father of those who believe in the name of His only begotten Son. If we know Him by faith to be our God and Father, reconciled to us, and acknowledging us as His children in Christ Jesus, we shall be disposed to give thanks to His holy name continually for His goodness and mercy vouchsafed to us. We shall praise Him with our whole hearts. The language of our souls will be, *What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?* We shall say with the Psalmist, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.*<sup>98</sup> Thus we shall give thanks to His holy name and praise Him for His benefits conferred upon us, being sensible that we are *not worthy of the least of all His mercies*. A thankful heart is an inestimable blessing. When we consider what reason we have for giving thanks to God as our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus, if we are indeed His children, we shall not only praise Him with our whole hearts; but we shall cheerfully acquiesce in all His dealings with us. If we believe

<sup>96</sup> Heb. xiii. 15. <sup>97</sup> 1 Pet. v. 10. <sup>98</sup> Psalm cxvi. 12.; ciii. 1, 2.

Him to be our Father, we shall acknowledge His right to dispose of us as He pleases. We shall commit our way to Him, and beseech Him to direct our steps. We shall desire to please Him in all our conduct.

Let us ask ourselves, Is this indeed the case with us? Do we thus manifest our gratitude for the mercies of which we are partakers through Jesus Christ our Saviour? Do we think of the love of Christ with thankfulness of heart, and do we seek to love Him in return for it, and to live in obedience to Him, to *do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus*, regarding Him as our rightful Sovereign and Lord, whom we are bound to obey in all things, *in word and deed*? If so, the exhortations of the apostle in the portion of the word of God to which our attention has been directed in the Epistle for this day, will not be disregarded by us. We shall earnestly implore the grace of the Holy Spirit to enable us to act as becometh those who are *the elect of God, holy and beloved* of Him, that we may show forth His praise, and honour His holy name and His word, and partake of His blessing day by day, and that we may also look forward in hope of receiving it hereafter, in His eternal kingdom and glory.

# SERMON XIV.

FOR THE

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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THE LOVE OF THE FATHER.

---

1 John iii. 1.

BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE FATHER HATH BESTOWED UPON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED THE SONS OF GOD! THEREFORE THE WORLD KNOWETH US NOT, BECAUSE IT KNEW HIM NOT.

THE object proposed by the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world, or by His appearing among mankind in the likeness of sinful flesh; and the blessings conferred thereby upon the children of men, are the topics brought to our notice in the Epistle for this day. That such great and inestimable blessings should be bestowed by Divine goodness and mercy upon our ruined race, excited the admiration and astonishment of our Lord's beloved disciple, and caused him to express his feelings in these words; in which the blessings described are said to flow from the love of the Father of

heaven to His rebellious creatures. This love led Him to adopt into His family those who had transgressed His holy law ; to put them among His children, to reinstate them in His favour, to promise that He would be *a Father unto* them, and would acknowledge them as *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*.<sup>1</sup>

The blessings consequent upon this wonderful act of love are next stated. The privilege first mentioned is a prelude to many others. The apostle says, *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*. It is the privilege of those who *are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*,<sup>2</sup> to look forward with a good hope to future blessedness, to *what they shall be* hereafter. This is a matter of vast importance to us dying creatures. What will become of us when we leave this world, is an enquiry to which the attention of all should be directed. We must all die, because we have all sinned against God. This is the inevitable lot of every individual of the human race. If we die without being reconciled to God, into His blissful presence we cannot be admitted. But it is the privilege of the believer in Christ to look forward to death as the time when his Lord and Saviour

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians vi. 18.

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

will receive him unto Himself, *that where He is, His people may be also.*<sup>3</sup> And the sight of his Saviour will have a transforming power upon his soul; for when he *shall see Him as He is, he shall be like Him*, at once perfectly conformed to His holy image, and will bear His resemblance in holiness for evermore.

Such being the prospect of the true Christian with regard to futurity, to which he looks forward with pleasing expectation, the apostle adds, *Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.* A hope in Christ of perfect conformity to Him hereafter, will produce a desire of being in a measure assimilated to His image, or made like Him, while we are here on earth. The purity which was manifested in all the conduct of our blessed Saviour while He appeared as a man among men, will be the pattern that His believing people will set before them, that they may be as far as possible conformed to it. Sin will be the object of their hatred and aversion; as that which is opposed to Divine purity, and *because of which cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*<sup>4</sup> The law of God, which is *holy and just and good,*<sup>5</sup> a transcript of His mind and will, will be the rule of their conduct, while they pray with the Psalmist, *Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes!*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John xiv. 3.   <sup>4</sup> Eph. v. 6.   <sup>5</sup> Rom. vii. 12.   <sup>6</sup> Ps. cxix. 5.



For, as the apostle observes, *Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.* As God has given us His holy law to be our directory, to point out to His creatures what is pleasing to Him, what they should avoid, and what they should practise; those who look forward with a hope of being blessed by Him and with Him hereafter, will beware of transgressing that law. They will regard the commission of sin as injurious to themselves and displeasing to God; and therefore will seek His grace to enable them to turn away from all sin, and to obey His holy will in all things. The great evil of sin appears in its being a departure from the will and commandment of God. The transgression of the law of God should not be regarded as a matter of indifference in any respect. It is the great rule of right and wrong; and it cannot be transgressed without exposing the transgressor to the righteous indignation and wrath of the Lawgiver; who has declared, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* And the only means whereby this curse can be removed from any transgressor is through faith in Him who *hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us.*<sup>7</sup>

To this wonderful proof of the love of our

<sup>7</sup> Galatians iii. 10—13.

Divine Redeemer the apostle next refers, in order to show the great evil of sin. *Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins.* Sin was so great an evil in the sight of God, that it could not be passed over, without full satisfaction being made to Divine justice. *The soul that sinneth it shall die,*<sup>8</sup> is the declaration of the Lawgiver ; and were the threat not put in execution, the Divine government would be at an end. On this account it was that a propitiation was requisite, in order to *magnify the law and make it honourable.*<sup>9</sup> As our Lord Jesus Christ appeared *to take away our sins ; to be the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,*<sup>10</sup> by bearing *His ownself our sins in His own body on the tree, suffering for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God ;*<sup>11</sup> the evil of sin is evident, since it caused the Holy One of God to endure such suffering and death, in order to take it away, or to remove its guilt and punishment from His believing people. The end proposed therefore by His suffering for sins was, *that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness,*<sup>11</sup> and no longer live in sin, or in *the transgression of the law* of God.

And as it is particularly declared, that *in Him is no sin*, those who put their trust in His sacrifice for their pardon and reconciliation with God, will seek as far as possible to be made like Him ;

<sup>8</sup> Ezek. xviii. 4. <sup>9</sup> Is. xlii. 21. <sup>10</sup> John i. 29. <sup>11</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 24 ; iii. 18.

to be *holy, harmless, and undefiled*,<sup>12</sup> as He was. But the apostle thinks it proper to state that this is necessarily the case; that a reliance on Christ for pardon obliges believers in Him to abstain from *the transgression of the law*. *Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not*. Faith in Christ and living in sin are incompatible with each other. He who professes to be a believer in Christ, and at the same time lives in the habitual violation of the law of God, is not one who abides in Christ, let his profession be what it may. If we are one with Christ, if we abide in Him, as the branch in the vine, which derives sap and nourishment from the stock and root to which it is united, we shall receive grace out of His fulness, the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, whereby we shall be enabled to *bring forth fruit unto God*,<sup>13</sup> and to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*; so that we shall not fulfil *the natural desires of the flesh and of the mind*, but *shall live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*.<sup>14</sup> If we abide in Christ, and have communion and fellowship with Him, we shall be preserved by His grace from living in the transgression of the law of God.

In order to show this more clearly, the apostle asserts that, *Whosoever sinneth, hath not seen Him, neither known Him*. If we see a man living in the

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews vii. 26.   <sup>13</sup> Romans vii. 4.   <sup>14</sup> Titus ii. 12.

open violation of the law of God, it is very evident that such an one is a Christian only in name, and not in reality. He has not seen Christ by the eye of faith, so as really and in earnest to seek for pardon through the bloodshedding and death of our Divine Redeemer; he has not known Christ as his Saviour; he has not partaken of His pardoning mercy; he is not interested in His great salvation. He is yet in his sins. He is *dead in trespasses and sins; walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*<sup>15</sup> His conduct proves that he knows nothing of the salvation of Christ.

This is a most important matter for consideration; and therefore the apostle adds, *Little children, let no man deceive you.* It is acting with the simplicity of ignorant little children to be deceived by a profession of religion, when the conduct is not conformed to the law of God; for it is evident that such a profession is only a mask or cloak put on in order to delude others. We may indeed deceive ourselves in this matter; but it is not so common for those who are living in the practice of iniquity to deceive themselves, as it is for them to take up a profession of religion for the purpose of deceiving others. We are therefore to judge of one another not by professions but by actions.

<sup>15</sup> Ephesians ii. 1, 2.

For this reason it is said, *He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.* When a man's conduct is consistent with his profession, it is then evident that he is not endeavouring to practise a deception upon his fellow creatures. If the law of God be the rule of his conduct, and he is living in obedience to its commandments, it is evident that his profession of reliance on the righteousness of Christ, as the only ground of his justification before God, is not an empty boast, but that he is one who being *justified by faith* has *peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>16</sup> While, on the other hand, he who makes this profession and lives in sin, is not one who is "accounted righteous before God."

For, *he that committeth sin is of the devil;* he is living in obedience to Satan, the adversary of God and man; and his conduct is conformed to that of the prince of darkness; *for the devil sinneth from the beginning.* So our Lord Jesus Christ said to some, who boasted of their religious privileges, and because of them called themselves the children of God; *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do; ye do the deeds of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his*

<sup>16</sup> Romans v. 1.

*own ; for he is a liar, and the father of it.*<sup>17</sup> All who are living in the practice of what God has forbidden in His holy law, are under the dominion of Satan ; who first set the example of transgression, which they are following, and is desirous of involving the children of men in the same ruin in which he himself is sunk.

But, *for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil ; that the snares of Satan might be broken, and an end be put to his usurped dominion over mankind. This was the great object proposed by the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. His name was called Jesus, because He should save His people from their sins ;*<sup>18</sup> *from the guilt and dominion of sin in this life, and from its punishment and existence in eternity. And of these His people, it is said, As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name ; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*<sup>19</sup>

These are the persons of whom the apostle says in the first verse of the Epistle for this day, *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. The nature and source of the*

<sup>17</sup> John viii. 41, 44.   <sup>18</sup> Matt. i. 21.   <sup>19</sup> John i. 12, 13.



privilege spoken of, and its consequences with regard to this world, are topics which here present themselves to our notice.

*First*, The privilege spoken of is that of being called *the sons of God*. This is the highest privilege which can be bestowed upon the children of men. To be the son of a king, or even of a nobleman, or a rich man, is accounted a great honour in this world. How much greater an honour must it be to be called *the sons of Him* who is *the King of kings and Lord of lords, the most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth*,<sup>20</sup> and especially to be acknowledged as such by Him, when that acknowledgment will be of the most incalculable value. This title was given to mankind originally in consequence of their having been created in the image and likeness of God. The prophet asks, *Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?*<sup>21</sup> And the apostle in this sense admits, *We are also His offspring.*<sup>22</sup> But by sin mankind have forfeited their inheritance as the children of God, and instead of being so accounted, are described as being *by nature the children of wrath*,<sup>23</sup> and by practice *the children of the wicked one*. The blessing of being accounted the children of God is restored to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the unspeakable gift of the God of heaven to mankind, to be their

<sup>20</sup> Gen. xiv. 19. <sup>21</sup> Mal. ii. 10. <sup>22</sup> Acts xvii. 18. <sup>23</sup> Eph. ii. 3.

Redeemer from the miserable state into which they had fallen by sin. On this subject our Saviour Himself taught that, *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*<sup>24</sup>

In reference to this invaluable gift it is, that the apostle exclaims in the text,

*Secondly*, In order to point out the source of it, *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!* It was love indeed to provide a Saviour for lost sinners. It was love most wonderful and extraordinary, for the offended Creator to form a plan for the restoration of His rebellious creatures to His favour. It was the love of God which was the source of the blessing spoken of, *that we should be called the sons of God.* It is the object of Divine revelation to make known this wonderful love of God to man. St. Paul therefore states, *that when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*<sup>25</sup> He gave His only begotten Son to assume human nature, to be *made in the likeness of men*, and to *humble Himself to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,*<sup>26</sup> that He might *bear our sins in His own body on the tree, and put away sin by the*

<sup>24</sup> John iii. 16.   <sup>25</sup> Galatians iv. 4, 5.   <sup>26</sup> Philippians ii. 7, 8.

*sacrifice of Himself.* How gracious a Father was He who manifested such love to His rebellious children, as to provide a ransom for their deliverance from the pit of destruction: who gave His own, His only begotten Son to suffer, bleed, and die, *that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage.*<sup>27</sup> And who, because of His holy law having been magnified and made honourable, by the obedience unto death of His beloved Son, justifies, accepts, and blesses those who had broken it, and incurred the penalty due to its transgression.

To be called the sons of God is to be acknowledged as such, so as to enjoy the privileges and blessings which the Father has promised to bestow upon His children. A father is bound to provide for the wants of his infant children, and is their natural protector from every thing that would injure or distress them. Such a Father is the Lord Almighty to all His children in Christ Jesus. There is nothing which they want that He is not able and willing to give them. It is therefore said, *The Lord God is a Sun and Shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly,*<sup>28</sup> for He is able to do exceeding abundantly

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews ii. 14, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

*above all that we ask or think;*<sup>29</sup> and is as willing as He is able. The apostle therefore assures believers in Christ, *My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*<sup>30</sup> They who have God for their Father then, have the best of benefactors and the most powerful of beings engaged on their side, to do them good, and to preserve them from all evil. What manner of love is that which leads Him thus to notice such worthless, undeserving creatures, as the sinful children of men; and to admit them to the enjoyment of His favour, His blessing, and His protection, instead of regarding them as the objects of His righteous indignation and displeasure. Let us behold this wondrous love with gratitude and praise, and seek above all things that we may partake of it, and that *the love of God may be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost being given unto us.*<sup>31</sup>

It becomes us to inquire for ourselves, Have we *received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father?*<sup>32</sup> Do we look up with reverence and affection to the God of heaven as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus? Do we seek His blessing? Do we implore His protection? If we are *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty*, we shall look to Him as our Father, for

<sup>29</sup> Eph. iii. 20. <sup>30</sup> Phil. iv. 9. <sup>31</sup> Rom. v. 5. <sup>32</sup> Rom. viii. 15.

the blessings which He alone can give to us. His blessing will be prized by us as our highest good. We shall desire to realise His presence continually, that we may live *as seeing Him who is invisible*.<sup>33</sup> We shall seek to hold intercourse with Him by prayer and praise. And this, not only in the house of God, and on the Lord's day; and in His appointed ordinances, where He is specially present with His waiting people; but at all times, day by day; in private, and in our families, as well as in public worship. It will be our earnest prayer, that *truly our fellowship may be with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ*.<sup>34</sup> We shall pray that the influence of the Holy Spirit may be vouchsafed to us for this purpose, that we may walk humbly with our God and circumspectly before Him; that *the words of our mouths, and the meditation of our hearts, may be acceptable in the sight of the Lord our strength and our Redeemer*.<sup>35</sup> There is no happiness to be found on earth like that which is derived from this source. It is indeed the happiness of heaven; for there the blessed spirits around the throne of God rejoice in partaking of His love, and in obeying His holy and blessed will.

But the apostle speaks,

*Thirdly*, Of the consequences, with regard to this world, of being admitted to the enjoy-

<sup>33</sup> Hebrews xi. 27.    <sup>34</sup> 1 John i. 3.    <sup>35</sup> Psalm xix. 14.

ment of so great a privilege as that of being *called the sons of God*, and partaking of the love of our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus. Such a blessing is not to be enjoyed without exciting the displeasure of those who are not partakers of it. It is observed, *Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not*. So it is said of our blessed Saviour, that *He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not*.<sup>36</sup> Those among whom He was conversant would not acknowledge His Divine power, notwithstanding the repeated proofs which He gave them of it, by the miracles that He wrought, and the benefits which He conferred upon all around Him. As the people of the world in Christ's day *knew Him not*, or would not acknowledge His claim of being the Son of God; so in all subsequent ages of the world, the claims of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ of being the children of God are not allowed by them. If their conduct be such *as becometh the gospel of Christ*,<sup>37</sup> the people of the world feel themselves condemned by it, and in order to excuse themselves will give a hard name to those whom they dislike; which in their opinion is a sufficient answer to any thing which may be commendable or praiseworthy in their conduct. Christians then need not be surprised if the world should cast out

<sup>36</sup> John i. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Philippians i. 27.



their names as evil, but should rather be contented to follow in the path in which their Saviour went before them. If we are indeed the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, truly believers in Him, and the sons, or children of God by faith in His name, we shall not look for our portion in this life, we shall not seek our happiness in the world, nor be surprised if the people of the world should not speak well of us. The apostles of Christ went through *evil report and good report*. All His followers in all ages may expect to be treated in the same manner. They are to be distinguished *by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand, and on the left.*<sup>38</sup> Let us seek grace from above thus to manifest ourselves to be the children of our Father which is in heaven, that while men take knowledge of us as such, they may have no evil thing to say of us, except it be in that which relates to our obedience to the law of our God. To this let us adhere continually, that He may be glorified in us and by us.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Corinthians vi. 6, 7.

# SERMON XV.

FOR THE

## SUNDAY CALLED SEPTUAGESIMA.

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THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

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1 Corinthians ix. 24.

SO RUN THAT YE MAY OBTAIN.

THE apostle Paul was accustomed to take advantage of passing events in order to illustrate the subjects of which he was treating. Such things are calculated to excite an interest in the mind, which it is desirable to turn to a good account. In the Epistle for this day he takes advantage of a practice well known at Corinth and other cities of Greece, in order to illustrate the Christian warfare. The Grecian games are renowned in history. They consisted of chariot and horse and foot races; and of different kinds of combats and wrestlings, for which various

prizes were awarded; and their celebration brought a great concourse of people to the city. St. Paul having lived in this place a year and a half, could not avoid hearing a great deal about these games, as they must have been a matter of common conversation. He therefore endeavoured to turn the subject to a useful purpose, by showing that it became Christians to emulate the zeal and ardour of the persons who contended for the prizes at these games; and that there was much more reason for the children of God to manifest earnestness and activity in their pursuit, since the prize set before them is of infinitely greater value, and vastly more honourable than any other.

He begins with asking, in allusion to these games, *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?* In these races there were many competitors for the various prizes, but the person only who outstripped his fellows, and first reached the goal, obtained the prize. The rest had merely their labour for their pains. If they had the honour of contending for it, they had the mortification of losing it. This is not the case with the Christian racer. There is no competition in this race as to which of the candidates shall gain the prize; for to every one that runs in it, so as to arrive at the goal, the prize shall be awarded.

But there are many opponents who endeavour

to throw obstacles in the way of the Christian, to slacken him in his pace, or to turn him aside out of the way, and so to prevent him from receiving the prize. These enemies of the Christian are called *principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness*, or wicked spirits, *in high places*.<sup>39</sup> These use all their subtle devices to hinder the Christian in his progress, and to prevent him from obtaining the prize, though they cannot procure it for themselves. The people of the world also, who care not for the prize, yet take a pleasure in endeavouring, if possible, to deprive the Christian of it, and to persuade him that the course which he is pursuing, in obedience to the word of God, is not the way to obtain it. On account of these opponents, many who seem to run well for a time are hindered, and turned out of the right course, so that they do not reach the goal, but fail of receiving the prize. In this respect, they are in the situation of the persons in the races referred to, who came to the end of the course too late. If we profess to have set out in the Christian course, and to be looking for the Christian prize, we must be on our guard against these our spiritual enemies. They were renounced in our name at our baptism; but if, notwithstanding, we follow or be led by them,

<sup>39</sup> Ephesians vi. 12.

we shall fail of obtaining the prize, which it was then professed we should keep in view to our life's end; and the obtaining of which will be for the eternal happiness of the believer in Christ.

When the apostle Paul described himself as a runner in this race, he said, *Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*<sup>40</sup> All who are *partakers of this heavenly calling*, who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who *enter in at the strait gate*, and press forward in the narrow way to the kingdom of heaven, will obtain this glorious prize. In this heavenly course *the race is not to the swift*;<sup>41</sup> but all who *run with patience the race that is set before*<sup>42</sup> them shall receive it. In this heavenly contest, *the battle is not to the strong*;<sup>41</sup> for all who *war the good warfare, who fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto they are called.*<sup>43</sup>

But as there are many impediments in the way, by means of which numbers, who seemed to set out with a good resolution are hindered, are drawn aside or offended, the apostle subjoins the exhortation in the text, *So run that ye may obtain.* How grievous will it be found to have fallen short of the prize, in consequence of having

<sup>40</sup> Phil. iii. 13, 14. <sup>41</sup> Eccl. ix. 11. <sup>42</sup> Heb. xii. 1. <sup>43</sup> 1 Tim. v. 12.

turned aside out of the course, after having seemed to enter upon it. To this exhortation we shall revert, after having made some observations on the remaining part of the Epistle for this day.

The apostle proceeds to remark, *Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things*. Those who designed to be competitors or antagonists in the Grecian games, were under the necessity of submitting to a course of restraint and self-denial; to go through a regular course of training, in preparation for the trial of skill, or agility, or strength, to which they looked forward. They thought no pains too great, no privation too severe, by the enduring of which they might hope to attain their object; though after all, it was a matter of uncertainty whether they would be able to obtain the prize or not. But in order to have the least hope of success, it was absolutely necessary for them to be *temperate in all things* for a long period before they could be candidates for it. What labour and pains are many willing to take, if thereby they may acquire a little worldly honour or fame, which after all will be of no permanent benefit, should it afford them even a momentary gratification.

The successful racer or combatant in the Grecian games obtained as his reward a crown of laurel, or other green leaves, which in a short time withered away; and was a fit emblem of the transitory honours which he had obtained,



... many impediments if the  
... of which numbers, who seemed  
... with a good resolution, the apostle subjoins  
... hands or offended, *So run that ye may*  
... in the text, the explanation is  
... How grievous will it be found to have  
... of the prize, in consequence of having

<sup>40</sup> Phil. iii. 13, 14. <sup>41</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 24. <sup>42</sup> Heb. xii. 1. <sup>43</sup> 1 Tim. v. 12.

turned aside out of the course. He had to be  
to enter upon it. He had to be  
revert, after having made some concessions in  
the remaining part of the course.

The apostle *proclaims* a *training*. It was  
*that striveth for the mastery* in *all things*. Those who  
or antagonists in the *Greco-Roman* were under  
the necessity of *submitting* to a *course* of  
strait and self-denial. It is *training* in the  
course of *training* in *disciplining* in the  
skill, or *agility* or *strength* in *which* they *advance*  
forward. They thought in *their* *own* *mind* *that*  
privation too severe in the *training*. *But*  
they might hope to attain *later* *in* *life*  
after all, it was a matter of *importance* *that*  
they would be able to *stand* *the* *test* *of* *it*.

But in order to have the *best* *hope* *of* *it*  
was absolutely necessary for them to *strive*  
*in all things* for a long period before they  
be candidates for it. *What* *is* *it* *that*  
are many willing to take a *little* *trouble* *to*  
acquire a little worldly *honour* *or* *wealth*  
after all will be of *no* *profit* *to* *them*  
it afford them even a *momentary* *pleasure*.

The *succession* *of* *the* *disciplines*  
Greco-Roman *games* *was* *not* *the*  
of law, or other *great* *things* *of* *the*  
time withered *away* *and* *the*  
the *transitory* *pleasure* *was* *not* *the*

*Now they do it, says the apostle, to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. The crown which the Christian combatant will receive when his contest shall come to an end, is a crown of glory that fadeth not away.<sup>44</sup> It is also called, the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him,<sup>45</sup> and a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give unto all them that love His appearing.<sup>46</sup> This is a crown which will never lose its splendour. The kings and priests unto God who are adorned with it, will wear it to the praise of the glory of His grace, who will place it on their heads, as a token of the triumph which they will then have obtained over His and their enemies; and they will not be deprived of it for ever and ever.*

The apostle shows the superior advantage of the Christian racer still further, by speaking of his own course; *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly.* The Grecian racer was uncertain of obtaining the prize after all his efforts and pains. Not so the Christian. He is certain that when he reaches the goal, he shall obtain the prize. Though all the others might reach it, yet he only who came first obtained the victor's crown in the Isthmian or Corinthian games. But in the Christian race, none who runs is disap-

<sup>44</sup> 1 Peter v. 4.

<sup>45</sup> James i. 12.

<sup>46</sup> 2 Timothy iv. 8.

pointed, none who steadily pursues his course, until he reach the journey's end, fails of obtaining the crown of glory.

Again the apostle observes, *So fight I, not as one that beateth the air.* Those who were trained for the Grecian combats were accustomed to keep all their bodily powers in action, and at the time of the games are said to have presented themselves before the assembled multitudes, in the manner here described; throwing about their arms in a menacing attitude, to challenge their opponents to come forward and contend with them. The Christian combatant is not engaged in a sham fight. He has real enemies to encounter, whom no menaces will deter from contending with him; who, on the contrary, are ever ready to challenge him to the contest, to wrestle with him in close combat, in order that they may overthrow his goings. For the purpose of coping with these, the apostle knew that he must be *strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man*; or he should not *be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* And that in order to obtain Divine aid he must *pray with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance.*<sup>47</sup>

But it was needful also for him to watch over himself, that he might not be taken by surprise

<sup>47</sup> Ephesians iii. 16; vi. 11, 18.

by his subtle and powerful foe. He therefore adds, *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.* This he intimates was not an airy contest, *not beating the air.* His expression is very forcible. The word rendered to *keep under* is said to mean in the first instance, “to make the face of an opponent black and blue with blows;” and the other word, rendered to *bring into subjection*, means “to reduce to slavery.” The contest then in which the apostle was engaged, was that of humbling and depressing and subduing the natural inclinations of his own corrupt nature, *the desires of the flesh and of the mind;*<sup>48</sup> that they might not be suffered to break out in the works of the flesh, which are displeasing to God and disgraceful to the cause of Christianity.

He opposed and mortified his own naturally carnal desires and inclinations; *lest that by any means, as he adds, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* How loudly does this language of the apostle call upon us to consider his exhortation, *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*<sup>49</sup> If it was needful for so eminent an apostle of Christ, while he was actively engaged in his Master’s service, and under the influence of Divine inspiration, to watch over himself, and to oppose his own natural desires and propensities in this decisive manner, and that in-

<sup>48</sup> Ephesians ii. 3.

<sup>49</sup> 1 Corinthians x. 12.

cessantly; and if the conflict occasioned to him so much trouble and pain; what reason have we, who are so far his inferiors in every respect, to be on our guard continually, and to beware of the devices and temptations of our spiritual enemies, *lest Satan should get an advantage of us.*<sup>50</sup> They who preach the gospel are not more secure from his assaults and snares, than those who hear it. And indeed Satan rejoices more in the fall of those who fill the more eminent stations in the church of Christ, if he can effect it, than in that of persons in a less conspicuous sphere; because thereby more dishonour is done to the cause of God. Divine grace is needful for all the children of God, to enable them effectually to oppose their spiritual enemies. When this is earnestly sought, under a sense of our own insufficiency of ourselves to keep ourselves, the grace of our Lord will be found sufficient for the protection and preservation of His waiting people, and His strength will be made perfect in their weakness. So the apostle found it, and so will the weakest believer in Christ find, who makes the Lord his refuge, and implores *grace to help in time of need.*<sup>51</sup>

The word translated *castaway* is one that refers both to cause and effect. It means "being rejected in consequence of being disapproved;"

<sup>50</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Heb. iv. 16.



and therefore shows that those who are living in the practice of iniquity and ungodliness cannot be in the way to heaven, let their profession be what it may. So the apostle plainly told the Ephesians, *Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*<sup>52</sup> Those who are in truth the children of God will be manifestly such by their likeness to their heavenly Father. Those who are the children of the wicked one will resemble him in their practice and conduct. So our Saviour reminded the Jews, who boasted, *We have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it.*<sup>53</sup> Those who are occupied in the works of the flesh, following the suggestions, and adopting the practices of the wicked one, vainly imagine themselves to be the children of God, though they may make an outward profession of religion. *He that saith I know God, and keepeth not His commandments, is*

<sup>52</sup> Ephesians v. 6.

<sup>53</sup> John viii. 42—44.

*a liar, and the truth is not in him.*<sup>54</sup> It becomes all who hear the gospel of Christ to pray that *faith* may be produced in them *by hearing the word of God*, and that *their hearts* may be *purified by faith*; that they may be *doers of the word*, and not *hearers only*, *deceiving their own selves*; that *being not forgetful hearers, but doers of the word*, they may be *blessed in their deed.*<sup>55</sup>

Thus pray for yourselves, brethren, that *the word preached* may *profit you*, *being mixed with faith* in your hearts; and that *your profiting* may appear *unto all men*, by *your conversation* or conduct being such *as it becometh the gospel of Christ.*<sup>56</sup> And pray also for us who preach the gospel, that we may by Divine grace be preserved from bringing a disgrace upon that cause which we profess to maintain, that our conduct may be in all things consistent with our profession, and that we may not allow ourselves in any thing which is forbidden or condemned by the word of God; but *may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, that we may rejoice in the day of Christ, that we have not run in vain.*<sup>56</sup> *Brethren, pray for us.* The apostle frequently intreated the prayers of his hearers; and surely we who now minister in holy things, have greater

<sup>54</sup> 1 John ii. 4.    <sup>55</sup> James i. 22, 25.    <sup>56</sup> Phil. i. 27; ii. 15.

need than he had of persevering prayer being made on our behalf at the throne of grace. It becomes the ministers of the gospel of Christ to be most careful *to show themselves approved unto God, as workmen that need not to be ashamed,*<sup>57</sup> and so to *serve Christ* that they may be both *acceptable to God and approved of men.*<sup>58</sup>

Let us now return to the consideration of the exhortation in the text, as one of universal application. *So run that ye may obtain.* Here is,

*First,* A duty commanded.

*Secondly,* A direction implied with regard to its fulfilment; and

*Thirdly,* The object to be kept in view. We learn,

*First,* That if we would obtain the heavenly prize, we must run the heavenly race. This is the duty commanded, *Run.* We must, as the apostle exhorts the Hebrews, *run with patience the race that is set before us.*<sup>59</sup> We must set out on this race in earnest, with a full purpose of obtaining *the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*<sup>59</sup> This must be our primary object in life, if we would really go to heaven. There are many persons who seem to think, that going to heaven is the natural termination of this life to all but a very few exceedingly wicked persons, who on account of the enormity of their crimes

<sup>57</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 15.      <sup>58</sup> Rom. xiv. 18      <sup>59</sup> Phil. iii. 14.

cannot be expected to go there. Such is not the representation of the word of God. It says, on the contrary, *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.*<sup>60</sup> Unless we enter in at the strait gate, in order that we may run in the narrow way which leadeth unto life, we cannot be admitted into heaven hereafter. Running denotes activity in the pursuit of an object, and an earnest desire to obtain it. He who runs a race is anxious to arrive at the goal. The act of running shows a purpose of mind not to be turned aside by any allurements or temptations which may be in the way; and a resolution to overcome every impediment which may be met with. In order to its being effectual, there must be a singleness of purpose not to be distracted by surrounding circumstances. Without this, success is impossible. Running also intimates not only one effort at the commencement of the race, but a succession of efforts until it be completed. The Christian race is therefore to be run *with patience*, not only with activity or alacrity, but with perseverance. We must not only *run*, but there is,

*Secondly*, A special direction given, *so run*; a

<sup>60</sup> Matthew vii. 13, 14.

certain course is marked out for us in which we must run, if we would obtain the prize. This direction is given at large by the apostle when writing to the Hebrews; he says, *Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*<sup>61</sup> Here we learn, that if we would run this race, we must lay aside every thing that would encumber us on our way; we must avoid all sin, we must turn from every evil way, we must forsake all evil practices, however pleasing to our natural inclination they may be, however alluring, however urgently they may press upon us for compliance with them; and our eye must be singly directed to our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Author and Finisher of our faith.* We must put our trust in Him alone for the salvation of our souls. Without this our course cannot be a Christian course. It must be entered on by faith in Christ and love to Him, and it must be continued by a life of obedience to His commandments, and of self-denial in every thing which God has forbidden, however gratifying to our fallen nature it would be to comply with

<sup>61</sup> Hebrews xii. 1, 2.

the temptations of our spiritual enemies, or mortifying to resist them. We must renounce, not in profession only, but in reality, the world, the flesh, and the devil. As we are not able of ourselves to do this, we must seek earnestly the grace of the Holy Spirit to enable us to pursue our course so as to please God. And,

*Thirdly*, The object is to be kept in view continually, for which we have set out on our race. We are *so to run, that we may obtain*. We are to be anxious above all things to obtain the prize, which is set before the Christian racer, *the crown of glory, that fadeth not away*. To obtain this must be our most ardent desire, for the sake of which we must be willing to give up every other pursuit which would come in competition with it. The exhortation implies that a man may make a Christian profession, and yet not obtain the Christian prize. *So run that ye may obtain* an incorruptible crown of righteousness, of life, of glory. Numbers, alas, are satisfied with bearing the name of Christians, who never become such in reality; who live without the love of Christ in their hearts, and die without a good hope of obtaining the salvation of their souls. If we would obtain the Christian prize, we must keep our object always in view, and act accordingly. It is not our baptism in infancy, that will secure to us this prize. It is not "the sign of the cross," made on our foreheads; but our



stedfastness in confessing "the faith of Christ crucified, and in manfully fighting under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil; and continuing Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end."

If we would not lose the crown, we must take the same course which the apostle did to obtain it. We must *with the heart believe unto righteousness*.<sup>62</sup> This *faith* is of the operation of God the Holy Spirit in the soul. He convinces of sin. He leads the penitent sinner to flee for refuge to Christ Jesus, the hope set before us in the gospel. Until a conviction of our lost condition by nature has been fastened upon our minds by the Spirit of God, and we have been led to seek for the pardon of our sins through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, we cannot have set out at all in the Christian course. If we have thus begun our race, we shall take the word of God for our directory in pursuing our heavenly journey, and shall pray for the guidance of His Holy Spirit in all our ways. We shall be looking *for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God, desiring a better country, that is a heavenly city, which God hath prepared for them*<sup>63</sup> that love and serve Him here on earth. May we *so run that we may obtain* the glorious prize; that the God of all grace may be glorified in the salvation of our immortal souls.

<sup>62</sup> Romans x. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Hebrews xi. 10, 16.

# SERMON XVI.

FOR THE

## SUNDAY CALLED SEXAGESIMA.

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THE GROUND OF GLORYING.

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2 Corinthians xi. 30.

IF I MUST NEEDS GLORY, I WILL GLORY OF  
THE THINGS WHICH CONCERN MINE IN-  
FIRMITIES.

THE labours, the zeal, and the sufferings of the apostle Paul were most extraordinary. He was an instrument raised up by God for the accomplishment of the most remarkable purposes of His grace; and in the performance of that which was enjoined upon him, he manifested the most unwearied diligence, and encountered the most violent opposition. His zeal led him to go as a messenger of the gospel of Christ over a great part of the Roman empire. He said, *From Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ: yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's*

*foundation; but as it is written, To whom He was not spoken of, they shall see; and they that have not heard shall understand.*<sup>64</sup> Thus he went forth and preached everywhere,<sup>65</sup> notwithstanding the opposition and persecution that he met with, and the sufferings that he endured; some account of which is given in the Epistle for this day.

In the chapter from which this Epistle is taken, St. Paul finds it needful to vindicate his own character, as an apostle of Christ, from the calumnies which had been cast upon him by some Jewish teachers, who having come to Corinth from Judea, had endeavoured to subvert the faith of those who had received beforehand the Christian instructions which the apostle had delivered; and in order to effect this the more readily, had attempted to depreciate him in the estimation of his followers. These persons went to various places where the ministry of the apostle had been successful, and sowed divisions among those who had received the doctrines of Christianity. Their great desire was to introduce among believers in Christ the rite of circumcision, and an observance of the ceremonial law of Moses. They did this in order that they might obtain credit with their countrymen for being zealous to promote the religion of their fathers. The apostle therefore speaks of their conduct in very

<sup>64</sup> Romans xv. 19—21.

<sup>65</sup> Mark xvi. 20.

strong terms. He says, *Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ; and no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light; therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.*<sup>66</sup> He acknowledges the folly of praising himself, or of contrasting his own conduct with that of these men; but his usefulness seemed in some degree to depend upon or to require the vindication of his character, and therefore he thought it necessary to do so.

In the Epistle for this day he begins with saying, *Ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.* He was persuaded that they would overlook the impropriety there might seem to be in speaking in his own praise, since they would see the need there was of it in this instance. They would exercise their forbearance towards him, as they had exercised so much more towards the persons of whom he had been speaking. *For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.* Such treatment he intimates they had borne from the false teachers, who had entangled them with a yoke of bondage, had laid upon them the

<sup>66</sup> 2 Corinthians xi. 13—15.

grievous yoke of Jewish ceremonies, which St. Peter called, *A yoke, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*,<sup>67</sup> which was quite contrary to *the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free*.<sup>68</sup> They had devoured or made a prey of them, had eaten them up, as we say, by quartering themselves upon them, when they had no right to do it. They had taken of them, or extorted presents from them. They had exalted themselves, as lords over God's heritage. They had even carried their pride and insolence so far, as to punish them for not tamely submitting to them in all things. It is often found that false teachers take upon themselves to exercise great authority over those who submit to them. This may be considered as affording a sample of the extravagant pretensions of the priesthood in countries where Popery prevails. Tyranny and exaction are their characteristics.

The Corinthians had borne all these things from the false teachers; and these men, finding that they met with no opposition, spoke of the apostle Paul as having acted in a mean, pusillanimous, foolish, weak manner, because his conduct had been so very different from theirs. *I speak*, says he, *as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak*. They had been taught to think disrespectfully of the apostle, and to des-

<sup>67</sup> Acts xv. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Galatians v. 1.

pise his authority. He therefore tells them, that as they had endured the forwardness and presumptuous confidence of these false teachers, he would show them that he had as good ground for glorying in external advantages as any others had. *Howbeit, whereinsoever any is bold, I speak foolishly, I am bold also.*

He then proceeds to examine their pretensions, and to compare them with his own, which he had not before obtruded. *Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.* He was not at all inferior to them in these outward advantages, if such they were esteemed. But he asks, *Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more.* Here he declares himself to be their superior; which he proves by relating what he had suffered for Christ's sake, while these men had used every means of avoiding persecution. *In labours more abundant.* He had travelled through Asia Minor and Greece, to make known the glad tidings of salvation through Christ in these parts of the world; not following the track of others, as the false teachers did; and as schismatics generally do; but going where Christ had not been preached before; that he might be the instrument of turning sinners from the error of their ways; not going to prey upon or to divide the flock of Christ, but to gather sheep into His fold, to the glory of His holy name.



And what recompense did the apostle receive for his great and abundant labours of love? Stripes, imprisonment, danger of being put to death. *In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned.* This was the reward which he received from his fellow-creatures. The Jews punished him according to their law, in which it was written, *Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed.*<sup>69</sup> The heathen punished him in the manner they were accustomed to do. At Philippi *the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them; and when they had laid many stripes on them, they cast them into prison.* At Lystra he was *stoned, and drawn out of the city, being supposed to be dead.*<sup>70</sup>

And not only did he suffer such things from his fellow-creatures, he met with many of what are called the common accidents of life, to which he would not have been exposed, had he not gone forth into the world to preach the gospel of Christ. He says, *Thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep.* An account is given of one of his shipwrecks on his voyage to Rome, at the island of Melita or Malta, in the twenty-seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. He was constantly going from

<sup>69</sup> Deuteronomy xxv. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Acts xvi. 22, 23; xiv. 19.

place to place on his errand of mercy ; and so was exposed to various perils or dangers. *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea.* His own countrymen were always opposed to him, and often laid snares to apprehend him and put him to death ; as at Corinth, *when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat.*<sup>71</sup> The heathen were also very hostile to Christianity, as it appeared in the tumult at Ephesus, which was excited because Paul had *persuaded and turned away much people from idolatry, saying that they be no gods which are made with hands.*<sup>71</sup> He was *in perils in the city*, not only on that occasion, but at Damascus also, as it is mentioned at the close of the chapter from which the text is taken. *In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me ; and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*<sup>72</sup> In his travels he passed through deserts, where he might have perished ; he went over the sea, and was in frequent danger. But that which pained him most of all was being *in perils among false*

<sup>71</sup> Acts xviii. 12 ; xix. 26.

<sup>72</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 32, 33. Acts ix. 24, 25.

*brethren*, such as were the false teachers, against whom he was obliged to vindicate himself.

In the pursuit of the glorious object which he had ever in view, the dissemination of the gospel of Christ, he was *in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness*; which he need not have endured, but for his anxious desire, or, as he expressed it, the *necessity* that was *laid upon* him to *preach the gospel* of Christ, wherever a door was opened for its reception.

In addition to all this, he had a continual anxiety for the spiritual welfare of those who had received the gospel through his instrumentality. *Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.* He was desirous to see the seed of the word of God which he had sown, spring up and bear fruit to the glory of God. For this he earnestly prayed. He rejoiced in the prosperity of the churches which he had planted. He mourned when any seemed to turn aside from the truth of the gospel. What a beautiful specimen we have of his care for all the churches, in his address to the elders of Ephesus, recorded in the twentieth chapter of the Acts.

As his calling to the ministry of the gospel of Christ had exposed him to such trials, and afflictions, and anxieties, he might well ask, *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended and I*

*burn not?* If others complained of weakness, or inability to support themselves under the load of obloquy and distress to which they were exposed, on account of their profession of the Christian religion, how much more reason had St. Paul to speak of his weakness, and to be bowed down and depressed under his trials and burdens. If others were offended at the reproach and persecution which they had met with for the sake of the cross of Christ, what reason had he to burn with indignation because of his sufferings. But, no! He knew that complaint and indignation became him not in this holy cause.

He therefore adds, on the contrary, *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities, or weaknesses, those in which his weakness most appeared.* As he says in the following chapter, *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* He considered it to be his highest honour, that the *strength* of Christ should be *made perfect in his weakness.*<sup>73</sup>

But as he had been so greatly and grievously maligned by the false teachers, who had sown tares in the garden of God during his absence,

<sup>73</sup> 2 Corinthians xii. 9, 10.

he thought it needful solemnly to assert respecting what he had stated before, as well as in reference to this last declaration: *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.* He appealed to the Searcher of hearts for the truth of what he had stated. Yet he felt that it was not expedient for him to glory; he had been compelled to do it against his will, that he might uphold the authority which the Lord had given him for the edification and not for the destruction of His church and people.

We have seen the nature of the infirmities in which the apostle gloried. Let us now consider the reason why he gloried in these things. They are naturally the object of dread and aversion; and therefore he must have had some powerful reason for his conduct. It was in consequence of receiving an answer to his prayers from the Lord Jesus Christ, who *said unto him, My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*<sup>73</sup> We learn here,

*First,* That the troubles and afflictions which came upon the apostle for Christ's sake, and which through his infirmity or weakness he was of himself unable to withstand or resist, led him to earnest prayer to the Lord Christ, and to an humble dependence upon His grace.

*Secondly,* They identified him with the cause of Christ.

*Thirdly*, They assured him that Divine aid would be granted in the time of his need. And he afterwards adds,

*Fourthly*, They led him to look beyond this present life, to rest and peace in the eternal kingdom and glory of God.

Let us briefly advert to each of these topics.

*First*, The apostle's sufferings led him to earnest prayer to Christ, and an humble dependence upon His grace. He felt as others do the afflictions which he was called to endure. Troubles gave him pain and uneasiness; he would gladly have avoided them; but instead of giving up the cause in which he was engaged in disgust and vexation, he carried all his troubles to the throne of grace, he *besought the Lord* Christ to relieve him; and he did this, not in a light and careless manner, but earnestly and repeatedly, as one who was anxious to be delivered from the affliction which disquieted his mind, and who knew that the Person to whom he applied was able to afford him the desired relief. If our troubles lead us to earnest and reiterated prayer, they will prove to us blessings in disguise.

The answer, however, which the apostle received to his earnest prayer was, not that his troubles should cease, not that the people of the world should be reconciled to him, and applaud him for his zeal in his Master's cause, instead of persecuting him; but that Divine grace would



bear him up against the opposition of the ungodly world, and would support him under his trials, and enable him to triumph over all the power of the enemy. This is recorded for our instruction, that we may be satisfied, that if our trials lead us to the throne of grace, earnestly to seek help from God in affliction, His overruling providence will order all things for us, if not in the manner that we would wish, yet in the way that will be most for His glory and for our real good. Let us then cast all our care upon God, and be persuaded that He careth for us, and will bless us while we place all our dependence upon His grace, so that we shall have reason to say that *He hath done all things well.*<sup>74</sup> The apostle learnt,

*Secondly,* That his afflictions identified him with the cause of Christ; since it was for Christ's sake that he suffered reproach and persecution. In reference to this he said, *I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.* When such was his benevolent design in preaching the gospel to his fellow-sinners, how remarkable was it, that he should *suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds,*<sup>75</sup> for his zeal and his disinterested labours. But he had counted the cost, and looked for no other recompense from the children of this world. He reminded the

<sup>74</sup> Mark vii. 37.

<sup>75</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 9, 10.

Thessalonians, *Verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass, and ye know.*<sup>76</sup> But when he looked forward to the bonds and afflictions which awaited him, he boldly declared, *None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*<sup>77</sup> The cross of Christ, it has been said, is the reward of His faithful followers. Happy are they who bear it in humility, after their Lord and Master. He has said to them, *Rejoice ye in that day, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*<sup>78</sup>

As the apostle's afflictions led him to earnest prayer, and as, in consequence, a gracious promise was given him of Divine aid; so,

*Thirdly,* They brought an assurance to his mind, that as he was identified by them with the cause of Christ, Divine aid would be vouchsafed to him in the time of need. Having this confidence, instead of being discouraged by his own weakness, he looked beyond the insufficiency of human instruments, and the powerful opposition of *the god of this world,*<sup>79</sup> Satan, and the ungodly, the servants of the prince of darkness, to the all-sufficiency of Divine power to overcome

<sup>76</sup> 1 Thess. iii. 4. <sup>77</sup> Acts xx. 24. <sup>78</sup> Matt. v. 12. <sup>79</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 4.

every obstacle, and to accomplish the purposes of His grace. The more he felt his own weakness, the more earnestly he sought help from God, or *that the power of Christ might rest upon him*; that he might *be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*.<sup>80</sup> That Christ might be glorified by his instrumentality was all he desired. Thus with regard to the success of his ministry, he gloried in his infirmities, or in his weakness, because the Divine power was displayed in making use of so feeble an instrument to promote the glory of God; and he was kept from ascribing his success in any measure to himself, and all the praise was given to God, to whom it was due. He was not discouraged on account of his own insufficiency for the work assigned to him, nor was he offended because of the unworthy treatment he received while he was employed in promoting the cause of God in the world; though he had much more reason to complain than any other person, and to be displeased with the offence of the cross than others had. But instead of complaint and indignation, he was satisfied that it was *enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his lord*;<sup>81</sup> he looked for no other treatment from the world than Christ had received. But the sufferings of this present time led him,

<sup>80</sup> Ephesians vi. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Matt. x. 25.

*Fourthly*, To look forward beyond this mortal life to the rest that remaineth for the people of God in His eternal kingdom and glory. The hope of good things to come was enough to make him willing to endure all present trials and afflictions, and to persevere in his attempts to benefit his fellow-creatures, let them act towards him as they would. He knew in whom he had believed, and that when he had *fought the good fight*, and had *finished his course*, having *kept the faith*, there was *laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge would give him at that day, and to all them also that love His appearing.*<sup>82</sup> And therefore he could say, *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; for we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*<sup>83</sup>

Let us remember that these things are left on record in the holy scriptures for our sakes ; that we may be led to follow the steps of the apostle's faith and hope in Christ, and may expect to *receive the same end of our faith, the salvation of our souls.*<sup>84</sup> All Christians are not called to be the ministers of Christ, but all are required to use their best efforts, and to offer up their fervent

<sup>82</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.    <sup>83</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 17; v. 1.    <sup>84</sup> 1 Peter i. 9.

prayers, for the success of His blessed gospel. They are to give it their support, as far as they have it in their power, in the sphere which they occupy; and to pray to *the Lord of the harvest* to give the increase, by His blessing upon the means used for the promotion of His own cause and glory. None are to think themselves too weak or too insignificant to act in this cause. None are to be ashamed on that account to confess Christ before men. Let it be our glory that *we serve the Lord Christ*; then we may be assured that our dependence upon His grace will not be in vain. Let us be anxious to please Him, and to advance His honour in the world. The more singleness of eye we have to His glory, and the more simplicity of heart in His service, the more happy shall we be, and the more confidence shall we have in His protection and care for us. If we are called to suffer tribulation of any kind, and especially for His name's sake, let it be our prayer that *tribulation may work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; a hope which maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* Let us seek to enjoy this love, and look beyond the afflictions of this present dying world to the blessedness of which the humble believer in Christ shall partake in the everlasting kingdom of his Lord and Saviour.

# SERMON XVII.

FOR THE

SUNDAY CALLED QUINQUAGESIMA.

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CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

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1 Corinthians xiii. 13.

AND NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY,  
THESE THREE; BUT THE GREATEST OF  
THESE IS CHARITY.

IN the chapter of which these words are the conclusion, which is appointed for the Epistle of this day, the apostle Paul gives a beautiful and interesting description of charity or love. He states both what it is not and what it is. He shows what are the effects which it produces in the life, wherever it really subsists in the heart; and then he institutes a comparison between it and other gifts of Divine grace, which were more eagerly sought after by the Corinthians, because



they obtained more applause among their fellow-creatures than was received by means of this most excellent gift. True religion is not designed to elate, but to humble the heart of man. Yet pride and ostentation endeavour to take root even in the profession of true religion.

It was needful in the infancy of the Christian church that miraculous powers should be granted to the members of it, for the confirmation of the faith. Those who possessed them were admired for the gifts which were conferred upon them. And some of these persons, such is fallen man, were vain of the gifts which had been bestowed upon them by God, and made an ostentatious display of them, as if they were a proof of superior holiness, instead of having been vouchsafed for the edification of the church, and to promote the conversion of the heathen from the error of their ways. The apostle therefore shows that however desirable these extraordinary gifts were, the ordinary graces of the Spirit of God were much more estimable, the exercise of them being of more real benefit to the church of Christ. The miraculous powers with which some were endowed were intended principally to be a sign to them that believed not, as they showed the difference between the supernatural manifestations of Divine power, and the false and lying miracles which were continually forged by the priests of idolatry. This evidence of the truth

of Christianity being no longer needed after the authoritative establishment of the Christian religion throughout the Roman empire, miraculous powers then appear to have ceased.

In the chapter before us, the apostle first speaks of the gift of tongues, which was a most important benefit conferred upon the church of Christ at that time, since by means of it the gospel of Christ was communicated to many who would not otherwise have had an opportunity of being made acquainted with it. He shows the uselessness of this gift to its possessor, unless he were also possessed of the Christian grace of charity or love. He says in his own person, *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.* The gift of tongues seems to have been greatly desired by many persons, as a mark of superiority; so that the apostle deems it needful to enlarge on the subject very particularly in the following chapter. He shows that the most extensive gift of tongues or knowledge of languages, united to the greatest fluency and eloquence of utterance, would be of no avail unless the talent were made use of to promote the glory of God and the salvation of mankind. The gifts were not bestowed in order to cause the persons who received them to be admired by their fellow-creatures, but to enable them to make known the gospel of Christ to

those with whom they would not otherwise have been able to hold any communication. Unless this end were answered by it, the speaking of foreign languages would do no good. It was merely an unmeaning voice, like *a tinkling cymbal*. It might excite surprise in those who heard it, and admiration of the men who were so gifted, but it would afford no instruction or edification. Without the love of God in the heart, flowing from the knowledge of His love in Christ Jesus, and producing love to mankind or compassion for perishing sinners, the miraculous gift of speaking in various languages would profit nothing. The mind of the speakers in these foreign languages would be so puffed up with pride and self-importance, that the gift would do them harm instead of good.

But the apostle goes further; *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing*. Here it appears that an ability to preach the gospel of Christ, and to explain the holy scriptures in general, a good understanding in the mysteries of Divine truth, an universal knowledge of Divine revelation, joined with miraculous endowments of the highest description, with power for instance to cast out devils, or to do any other thing which might produce astonishment and wonder in the be-

holders;—all these outward advantages, unless made use of to the *godly edifying which is in faith*<sup>85</sup> and love, would be of no avail, would be an injury rather than a benefit to the possessor.

The apostle goes a step beyond this. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* Here we see to what a length ostentation may be carried even in religious matters. The poor may be fed, without love to God and man being the motive for doing it; and what seems most astonishing, the body may be given to be burned, in an obstinate defence of the religious cause to which men are attached, from party spirit, without any benefit being derived from it. A man may reduce himself to poverty by alms-giving, and may subject himself to be put to death, even unjustly, and for the cause of true religion, and yet be without charity, without the love of God in his heart. This may seem a hard saying; but *the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*<sup>86</sup>

It is right that we should give credit to the benevolent and bountiful, and to those who subject themselves to personal privations; hoping that such effects are produced by true charity,

<sup>85</sup> 1 Timothy i. 4.

<sup>86</sup> 1 Samuel xvi. 17.

or love to God and man; but it has sometimes been found that what has appeared most commendable among men in outward show, was an abomination in the sight of God. Alms make no atonement for sin, are no satisfaction to Divine justice. No bodily privations, or mortifications, or sufferings, compensate for our offences against God. We must have the love of God in our hearts, to actuate us to every good word and work, in order that our doings may be acceptable to Him. To this end, *The love of God must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us;*<sup>87</sup> *we must love Him, because He first loved us.*<sup>88</sup>

Of this love, as to its exercise towards our fellow-creatures, it is said, *Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.* It is exercised with patience and perseverance and kindness. It is not rash in its judgment of others, nor vain-glorious with regard to itself. It is not puffed up with self-importance. *It doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.* It does not act any base part. It is not selfish. It does not resent provocations, but rather pities those who are inclined to give them, and endeavours to avoid such persons, rather than return evil for

<sup>87</sup> Romans v. 5.

<sup>88</sup> 1 John iv. 19.

evil, or railing for railing. It imputes as far as possible the best motives to others, and excuses their conduct, if this can be done without injury to the truth; for it *rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*. It has *no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reproves them*.<sup>89</sup> The rejoicing of the ungodly is not that in which it takes pleasure. It is always associated with the truth. It has nothing to do with falsehood and deceit. But in its general character, *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*. It covers, conceals, or does not expose to view the defects of others, which it may discern. It gives credit to others for that sincerity which itself possesses. It hopes the best of them, and suffers with patience what may assail it.

What a beautiful description of character is this! How was it illustrated by our blessed Saviour in the days of His flesh! We may look at each part of this description, and then turn to various circumstances in our Saviour's conduct, and see it exemplified. He was indeed the highest possible pattern of philanthropy. How ought we to love Him for it, and to seek grace from Him that we may be enabled to copy so excellent a pattern.

The apostle having given this description of

<sup>89</sup> Ephesians v. 11.



charity, institutes a comparison between it and other things, in order to show its vast superiority. He says, *Charity never faileth*. This is the great and distinguishing characteristic of this Christian grace over all other things with which it may be compared. It will survive "the wreck of nature and the crash of worlds." It is the blessedness of heaven, as well as of earth. In heaven love is the element of all those who are admitted to the beatific vision of God.

How much more desirable then is it to possess this heavenly grace, than to enjoy the greatest outward advantages; for *whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away*. The preaching of the gospel will come to an end with this world. The various languages of the nations of the earth will cease to be spoken, when all these things shall be dissolved. The knowledge of human arts and sciences will be of no value, when the things with which they are conversant are all destroyed. We shall carry nothing of human knowledge away with us when we depart hence. And the most extensive earthly knowledge is but partial. *For we know in part, and we prophesy in part*. How little of Divine truth is the best instructed scribe of the kingdom of heaven acquainted with! What a partial representation of it is given by the most eminent ministers of the gospel! This becomes

evident as the mind is made acquainted with the vast extent of Divine truth; for *when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*. The best informed teachers, the most accomplished scholars in Divine revelation, are but in a state of infancy in knowledge, while they are in this world.

The apostle says, *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*. If we compare the ideas of children and men, or our own ideas when we were children with what they have been in a state of maturity, we see that there is a vast difference between them; and similar, it may be conceived, will be the difference between what believers in Christ know on earth, in comparison with what they will be made acquainted with hereafter. *For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known*. Now we are obliged to form our ideas of heavenly things by what we know of earthly things; like persons who looked at themselves in brazen mirrors, which gave but an imperfect representation of the object. But when the believer in Christ is admitted into heaven, then he will see things as they are in reality, and not through an obscure medium. Now we can take only a partial view of things, with which we cannot, from their na-

sure and our circumstances be fully acquainted; but then our circumstances will be so different, that we shall have a full and complete knowledge from actual perception and enjoyment. What a delightful view does this afford of things unseen and eternal! Let it be our anxious desire and earnest prayer that we may obtain this blessed sight, knowledge, and fruition. The way to it is pointed out briefly in the text. *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* That which is needful for us now, in the

*First place, is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without this there can be no salvation. We must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to be saved, for there is no salvation in any other; there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.<sup>90</sup> We must put our trust in Him as the Saviour of sinners, for the salvation of our own souls. We must confess our sins before God, and implore pardon for Christ's sake, because He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed;<sup>91</sup> believing that in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.<sup>92</sup> This faith, which embraces the Lord*

<sup>90</sup> Acts xvi. 31; iv. 12.    <sup>91</sup> Isa. liii. 5.    <sup>92</sup> Eph. i. 7.

Jesus Christ, and appropriates His merits to the soul, is called *the faith of the operation of God*.<sup>93</sup> The Spirit of God brings home a conviction of sin to the conscience of the sinner, shows him its evil and desert, and at the same time makes known to him the infinite efficacy of the Redeemer's merit to remove the guilt of sin; so that for His sake, those who believe in Him are freely *forgiven all their trespasses*,<sup>93</sup> and *their sins and their iniquities shall be remembered no more*. Faith gives credit to the word of God and acts upon it. The Spirit of God enables the believer to do this. We are therefore to pray to Him for this blessing, *that our faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*.<sup>94</sup> The faith here spoken of is not that of the mind and understanding only, but that of the heart; *for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*.<sup>95</sup> It is therefore called, *receiving the love of the truth*.<sup>96</sup>

The plan of salvation proposed in the word of God may be understood in theory, while the heart is not brought under its sacred influence. Where a true and living faith is, it *purifieth the heart*, and works by love. There is a faith which is attained by the power of human reason, in which it is to be feared many rest; a faith which adopts Christianity as its creed, because it is the religion of the country or the community to which

<sup>93</sup> Col. ii. 12, 13. <sup>94</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 5. <sup>95</sup> Rom. x. 10. <sup>96</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 10.

its possessor belongs; but which does not lead the heart to God, or produce love to Him, and a desire to live to His glory. There may be regularity of conduct in those who have this *dead faith*, but it arises from education or habit, or the desire of appearing respectable in society. In many cases it is the interest of the deceiver of mankind to have such persons held up as examples of good conduct. They are thus led to trust in their ownselves, and remain insensible that they need the salvation of Christ. It becomes those who partake of a living faith in Christ to be watchful over their own conduct; but at the same time it is essential that our hearts be given up to God, to love Him above all things, that our faith may be pleasing to God, as well as profitable unto men. A living faith produces,

*Secondly, Hope towards God. Now abideth hope.* The hope of the believer in Christ is directed beyond this present life to things unseen and eternal. It is therefore said that Christ is in His believing people *the hope of glory*.<sup>97</sup> They hope to receive what God has promised to bestow, and they wait for it in faith and patience. In consequence of having this hope, they *seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; they set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth,*<sup>97</sup> having

<sup>97</sup> Colossians i. 27; iii. 1, 2, 4.

an expectation that *when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory.*<sup>97</sup> This hope sustains them under all the troubles and afflictions of this life. It is called *an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, which entereth into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, our High Priest*<sup>98</sup> and Intercessor before the throne of God. Those therefore who have this hope, *look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal;*<sup>99</sup> reckoning *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in*<sup>1</sup> the children of God hereafter. This Christian *hope maketh not ashamed.*<sup>1</sup> They who, believing in Christ, hope for these good things to come, shall not be disappointed of their hope. When they have done with all things here below, their faith will be lost in sight, and their hope in enjoyment. It will be realized in their eternal blessedness. It is called by St. Peter, *a lively hope; and is said to relate to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, or to salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*<sup>2</sup> How animating is this hope! They who possess it may well be *rejoicing in hope,*<sup>3</sup> and *wait all the days of their appointed time till their change come;*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Heb. vi. 19, 20.    <sup>99</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 18.    <sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 18; v. 5.



since they shall then *enter into the joy of their Lord*,<sup>5</sup> to rejoice in His great salvation for evermore.

Let us ask ourselves, Upon what are our hopes fixed? Where are we looking for happiness? To things temporal or things eternal? The Christian's hope is fixed beyond this mortal scene. Let us see to it that our *hope be laid up in heaven*,<sup>6</sup> and that it is derived from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or that it relies on the promises of God made to believers in Him; and then it will not meet with disappointment. Where this faith and hope exist, there also the other Christian grace, on which the apostle has enlarged in this chapter, will be manifested.

*Thirdly, Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three.* In the exercise of charity or love, the believer in Christ has an anticipation of heavenly enjoyment. This also affords undoubted evidence of the reality of his faith and hope in Christ; that his faith is unfeigned, that his hope is not a delusion. For where these are, there must be conformity to Him who is trusted in for pardon and salvation, and from whom our hope of eternal happiness is derived; there must be love to God, and love of the brethren. And this love will survive the putting off of our earthly tabernacle, and therefore it is called the greatest

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3—5. <sup>3</sup> Rom. xii. 12. <sup>4</sup> Job. xiv. 14. <sup>5</sup> Matt. xxv. 21.

of the three. *The greatest of these is charity.* Faith and hope are inhabitants of earth only. Charity or love is the joy of heaven. It commences in the heart of the believer in Christ on earth; here *we love Him because He first loved us;*<sup>7</sup> but it will be consummated or perfected when the Christian arrives in the realms of bliss. Here on earth the believer at best hardly knows what love to God is; his love is like a spark in the ocean, which seems ready to be extinguished every moment; but when he reaches the heavenly shore, it will burst forth into a pure flame, and burn with undiminished splendour for evermore. Feeble, however, as the love to God is, which is kindled in the Christian's heart by the Holy Ghost, yet it is by this alone that we can enjoy any anticipation of the delights of the heavenly world, for this alone of the graces specified will accompany us thither. This charity or love may therefore well be called *the greatest* of Christian graces. He who enjoys most of this, enjoys most of heaven in his soul.

Let us then, as the apostle exhorts us, *follow after charity*; let us ardently desire and seek after the enjoyment of the love of God in Christ in our souls, that thus we may be happy in life, happy in death, and happy for ever. This is the richest, the best of blessings. May we en-

<sup>6</sup> Colossians i. 5.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John iv. 19.

joy it to the praise of the glory of Divine grace. Let it be our prayer that our love to the Lord Jesus may abound more and more, that our hope in Him may be steadfast, that our faith in Him may be unshaken. For this purpose let us use the means of grace, and attend on the ordinances of Divine appointment; let us commemorate the dying love of Christ as He has commanded us, that we may "feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving," to the glory of His holy name. Let us pray earnestly that we may receive more grace out of His inexhaustible fulness, so as to increase in the knowledge and love of Him day by day; that cleaving to Him with purpose of heart, we may go on our way rejoicing in His holy name. And when by the will of God we shall have served our own generation, may we *sleep in Jesus*, and awake up after His likeness to be perfectly satisfied with it, and to love Him above all things, and to glorify and praise Him for evermore, throughout the countless ages of eternity.

# SERMON XVIII.

FOR

ASH WEDNESDAY.

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TRUE HUMILITY.

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Joel ii. 13.

REND YOUR HEART, AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS, AND TURN UNTO THE LORD YOUR GOD; FOR HE IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL, SLOW TO ANGER, AND OF GREAT KINDNESS, AND REPENTETH HIM OF THE EVIL.

“THE portion of scripture appointed for,” or instead of, “the Epistle” on this day, is suitable to the season on which we now enter. The exhortation with which it commences can never be unseasonably addressed to sinful men. It is a call from the Lord our God, *Turn ye, even unto Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning,* or with the tokens

of penitence and sorrow, as well as in sincerity and truth. The prophet Isaiah declares, *All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way;*<sup>8</sup> the way of error and transgression. It is well when any thing occurs to turn us back again into the right way. How gracious is the Lord our God, from whom we have so grievously revolted, to call upon us to turn to Him. This, however, is His constant language in His holy word to the children of men. Oh! that we were affected by it as we ought to be, and that the language of our hearts in reply were, *Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God!*<sup>9</sup> When we turn to Him it must be *with all the heart*, with the best affections of our souls, that we may love Him above all things; and not with feigned lips. It must also be with outward demonstrations of humiliation before God, as well as with inward feelings of it. Penitence and sorrow are to be felt and manifested in our turning to the Lord. These are to take the place of that spirit of self-gratification, of carelessness, and levity, which the world pursues.

But while outward demonstrations of penitence are required, sorrow and grief for sin, that which is most material, is insisted on. *Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto*

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah liii. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah iii. 22.

*the Lord your God.* It is the *humble and contrite heart and spirit*<sup>10</sup> which the Lord looks upon with favour, and not the external marks of humiliation. That which melts the heart with grief before God for transgression is the consideration, that to them who turn to Him, in obedience to His command, He does not display Himself as the God of vengeance, which He might justly do, but as *gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenting Him of the evil.* This was the character in which He revealed Himself to Moses,<sup>11</sup> and this character He always manifests Himself as sustaining towards all those who truly humble themselves before Him, and earnestly seek His blessing. He is ever ready to show them His favour, to manifest to them His compassion, to prove Himself to be slow to anger, to make known to them the greatness of His loving-kindness, and that He is unwilling to visit upon them the evil which they deserve to suffer on account of their transgressions. This is the character which the gospel of Christ represents the Lord God as sustaining towards the sinful children of men, when He invites them to be reconciled to Him.<sup>12</sup> Did we believe that this is indeed His real character, we should assuredly seek for the enjoyment of all the blessedness which is to be derived from the knowledge of it.

<sup>10</sup> Isa. lvii. 15; lxvi. 2.   <sup>11</sup> Exod. xxxiv. 6.   <sup>12</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18—21.



On the representation here given of the revealed character of the Lord God, it is asked, *Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?* Who knoweth but He will refrain from pouring out His threatened wrath, when those against whom it has been denounced humble themselves at His footstool, and seek for the manifestation of His mercy and compassion; and that instead of destroying the land, He may pour down His blessing upon it; so that the ordinances of His worship may not be abolished, but continued; that there may be still *a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord God*, presented in His temple, as was customary? The destruction threatened in the former part of this chapter would prevent this offering being made, if the land should be invaded by a powerful enemy; of whose progress it is said, *A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth; yea, and nothing shall escape them.*<sup>13</sup>

For the purpose of averting so dreadful a judgment, proclamation is made, *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation.* A public day of humiliation is here proclaimed in the most solemn manner, a day to be sanctified or set apart as holy to the Lord, on which the people should be gathered together humbly to

<sup>13</sup> Joel ii. 3.

implore His gracious interference on their behalf, that they might not be overrun by the armies of the destroyer. All the people, from the least to the greatest, are called upon to seek the Lord. *Assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts.* And even those who were exempt on other occasions from being disturbed in the midst of their enjoyments, were now to abase themselves before God. *Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.* All the people, the whole congregation were to be present, none were to be absent on this solemn occasion, as it was a matter in which all were most deeply interested, that Divine compassion and help should be obtained.

But especially, it is added, *Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?* When Divine judgments are threatened, it becomes those persons especially who minister in holy things, who wait upon God on behalf of His people in the sanctuary, who utter in His presence the supplications that are made before Him, and who have been set apart to instruct the people in His will;—it becomes them to make use of the station which they occupy in

His house to plead with Him for mercy, that He would spare and not destroy those who call upon His name, that He would not suffer His people, His possession, to pass into the hands of those who would take occasion to reproach His name, while they oppressed His heritage; that those who know not the Lord might not have an opportunity of insulting over His people by asking contemptuously, *Where is their God?* as if His power were not almighty, as if He were not able to deliver His people from the hand of their enemies.

The Israelites were called upon by the prophet of the Lord to humble themselves before God as a nation, in the manner that has been described, in consequence of the judgments with which they were threatened. And they were assured that *then would the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people.* Our church calls upon us year by year to humble ourselves in like manner before Him, and to pray that His mercy may be vouchsafed to us. O that *the Spirit of grace and of supplications*<sup>14</sup> were poured upon us, that we might humble ourselves before God, and mourn *every one of us apart* for our own sins and the sins of our country; so that Divine compassion being vouchsafed to us as a nation, His judgments may be averted from us.

<sup>14</sup> Zechariah xiii. 10.

The words which have been selected for the text, or as the subject to which our attention is further to be directed, are brought before us not only at this time, but are among the sentences appointed to be read at the commencement of our daily service, both morning and evening. They therefore peculiarly deserve our serious attention. We may consider them as stating,

*First*, The nature of that humiliation before God which is pleasing to Him; and

*Secondly*, The reason why we should humble ourselves before Him, both individually and collectively.

May the Spirit of God bring home His word to our hearts by His own power, that we may be led to abase ourselves at His footstool, and may rejoice in partaking of the blessings of His grace and salvation.

*First*, The nature of that humiliation before God which is pleasing to Him is here pointed out. *Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.* It was customary in former times, and it is still the custom in the hot countries of the East, to wear loose robes. And it was a token of grief or mourning for people to rend their upper garment. Of this practice frequent mention is made in the holy scriptures. Thus when king David heard a report that Absalom had slain all the king's sons, it is said, *Then the king arose and tore his gar-*

*ments, and lay on the earth, and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent.*<sup>15</sup> David acted in a similar manner when he heard of the death of Saul and Jonathan,<sup>16</sup> and on other occasions. Thus also when Ezra the priest had been informed that the Israelites had mingled themselves among the heathen, and joined in affinity with idolaters, which God had expressly forbidden them to do, he said, *When I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.*<sup>16</sup> So also when Mordecai heard of the royal decree for the destruction of the Jews throughout the Persian empire, *he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry.*<sup>17</sup> In these cases the rending of their garments was a token of the grief with which the several parties were affected.

But in the text the Lord God calls for humiliation of heart before Him, and not for the outward tokens of mourning only. He who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men, cannot be satisfied with merely external observances. To rend the heart denotes a separation from that which is the object of affection, or in which real gratification is found. It is self-denial with regard to those

<sup>15</sup> 2 Sam. xiii. 31; i. 11.    <sup>16</sup> Ezra ix. 3.    <sup>17</sup> Esther iv. 1.

beloved sins, on the commission of which the heart of fallen man is naturally set, or which afford it the greatest pleasure; those things which the apostle calls, *All that is in the world, or all that the people of the world take pleasure in, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*;<sup>18</sup> those things in which the flesh seeks gratification, or which the eyes look upon as objects of carnal desire; or of which we are disposed to be proud. With regard to all these things the heart must be rent from them, in these it must be mortified and not indulged; we must be separated from them, and not cleave to them, or seek our happiness in them, if we would find acceptance with God. No outward change will be of any avail, without a change of heart. The love of sin must be mortified, as well as the practice of it shunned or denied. *They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.*<sup>19</sup> This is the only humiliation which is acceptable to God.

But in connexion with this rending of the heart, this separation from sin, and true self-denial, or turning from every evil way, we are called upon also to *turn unto the Lord our God*. People sometimes break off from one sin and indulge themselves in another. That will be of no use. It will not remove the load of guilt

<sup>18</sup> 1 John ii. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Galatians v. 24.



from the conscience. Where any sin has the dominion, it will ruin the soul. *For, as St. James observes, He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law; for he that shall offend in one point, is guilty of all.*<sup>20</sup> If we are truly humbled for sin, if we see its evil and danger, and turn from it as a matter in which it is dangerous for us to continue, we shall find no rest in any thing short of turning to the Lord our God, and seeking happiness in the knowledge and love of Him. That which falls short of this, is humiliation for sin to little purpose.

If we are not reconciled to God, if we know Him not as our Father and our Friend, our hope and our *portion in the land of the living,*<sup>21</sup> we can have no rest for our souls. But we are invited, in the depth of our misery and distress, when we are vexed with ourselves, and dissatisfied with all around us, to turn to the Lord our God, and to seek happiness and salvation in the knowledge and love of Him; and we are assured that such happiness is to be found in Him as the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away, or deprive us of; for He who is the source of the joy of His people, and in whom they are led to seek their happiness, is without

<sup>20</sup> James ii. 10, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Psalm cxlii. 5.

*variableness or shadow of turning,*<sup>22</sup> and He will not fail nor forsake them that put their trust in Him. He to whom we are exhorted to turn is the Lord, Jehovah, the Creator of all things, in whom *we live and move and have our being*, who *giveth to all life and breath and all things,*<sup>23</sup> who giveth us all things richly to enjoy. How reasonable is it that we should turn to Him; that the creature should seek its happiness in the knowledge and love of its Creator.

But when we contemplate the infinite greatness and unspeakable majesty of the Lord Jehovah, and our own insignificance; when we consider Him as *the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy*, who dwelleth in the *high and holy place;*<sup>24</sup> we may well tremble with the apprehension of coming into His immediate presence, and fear lest we should be rejected by Him, since He is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.*<sup>25</sup> In order to remove such reasonable apprehensions, He is pleased to call Himself *our God*, a name which denotes His covenant engagements on behalf of the children of men; and on which account He is pleased to reveal Himself as sustaining a relationship to His rebellious creatures; in consequence of which we are permitted to approach Him under the name of the Father, the Son, and

<sup>22</sup> James i. 17. <sup>23</sup> Acts xvii. 25, 28. <sup>24</sup> Isa. lvii. 15. <sup>25</sup> Hab. i. 13.

the Holy Ghost; or, our Father who is in heaven; our Redeemer, who humbled Himself to take our nature, that in it He might obey and suffer all that was needful for the reconciliation of man to God; and our Sanctifier, who leads and guides, instructs and blesses, dwells in, comforts, and sanctifies those whom He enables by His grace to turn to the Lord their God. It is because this Triune Jehovah is *our God*,<sup>26</sup> that we are encouraged to turn to Him, and seek His favour and blessing. And on this account the text presents to us,

*Secondly*, A reason why we should turn to the Lord our God, by making known to us the characters in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself for our encouragement; *For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. He is gracious*, or ready to manifest His favour to the penitent sinner who humbly and earnestly implores grace at His footstool. He graciously declares, *I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain.*<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, He exhorts the children of men, *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God,*

<sup>26</sup> Psalm lxvii. 6; lxxviii. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Isa. xlv. 12.

*for He will abundantly pardon.*<sup>28</sup> And again He says respecting those who cry unto Him, *I will hear, for I am gracious.*<sup>29</sup> Let the consideration of the riches of His grace, His readiness to pardon, accept, and show favour to those who truly turn to Him, and seek Him with their whole hearts, be our encouragement to humble ourselves at *the throne of grace*, confessing our unworthiness of His favour, and imploring His *grace to help us in the time of our need*. Let us turn unto Him with our whole hearts and not with feigned lips, and we may be assured that *He will be very gracious unto us at the voice of our cry, that He will hear and answer*<sup>28</sup> and bless us.

*He is also merciful*; that is, He has bowels of compassion, as a parent towards his own child, for those who humbly seek His face or His mercy in Christ Jesus. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.*<sup>30</sup> All the dealings of His providence towards the children of men, show that *His tender mercies are over all His works.*<sup>31</sup> His word is the revelation of His mercy. This mercy was manifested at the fall of our first parents, in the promise of the Seed of the woman to bruise the head of the old serpent, their deceiver; to the fulfilment of which the patriarchs and prophets and

<sup>28</sup> Isa. lv. 6, 7; xxx. 19.   <sup>29</sup> Exod. xxii. 27.   <sup>30</sup> Ps. ciii. 13.

righteous men of old looked forward with earnest expectation, *Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*<sup>32</sup> It was manifested most especially by the appearing of our Saviour Christ, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself;<sup>33</sup> in consequence of which it was announced by His apostles, that to Him gave all the prophets witness, that, through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins;<sup>34</sup> for that in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded toward us.<sup>35</sup> We are therefore assured that He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will with Him also freely give us all things<sup>36</sup> that we stand in need of. He will show the tenderness and care of an almighty and most merciful Father to them that truly turn to Him, and seek earnestly His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.

*He is likewise slow to anger; not hot and passionate and implacable, as men frequently are towards those who have offended them. He is on the contrary ready to be appeased, when the children of men deprecate His displeasure and implore His mercy in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>31</sup> Ps. cxlv. 9.    <sup>32</sup> 1 Peter i. 11.    <sup>33</sup> Heb. ix. 26.    <sup>34</sup> Acts x. 43.

*He is further of great kindness*, so great, that it is wonderful indeed when we consider His almighty power, that instead of exercising it at once in the destruction of His enemies, He should be ready to forgive them, when they humble themselves before Him. His loving-kindnesses are multiplied towards the children of men in the most astonishing manner. It was His kindness and love which provided a Saviour for the guilty, a Redeemer for perishing sinners, and He still delights in bestowing upon them His salvation, and making them partakers of its blessings in time and in eternity.

It is also added, that He *repenteth Him of the evil*. He has denounced evil against the transgressors of His holy law, which will assuredly overtake hereafter all those who die in their sins. But in the mean time, He is slow to execute His wrath upon the children of men in this world ; He spareth those who deserve punishment, and *in the midst of wrath remembers mercy*,<sup>37</sup> and shows compassion. This is not after the manner of men. We sinful creatures do not act with unwearied kindness in this manner towards each other, when one has a supposed cause of offence against another.

This goodness of God should lead us to repentance and self-abasement before Him. If

<sup>35</sup> Ephesians i. 7.    <sup>36</sup> Romans viii. 32.    <sup>37</sup> Habakkuk iii. 2.



we have reason to dread His displeasure against us on account of our transgressions, let us humble ourselves at His footstool, and implore His pardoning mercy for the sake of His beloved Son, our Redeemer; and then we may be assured that He *will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and our iniquities He will remember no more.*<sup>38</sup> He has made known to us His character in the text in order to win our hearts to Himself, and to lead us to come to Him for the blessings of His grace, and to turn from every evil way. May His word be effectual by the power of His Spirit to accomplish in us the good pleasure of His goodness to His glory, and the salvation of our souls.

<sup>38</sup> Hebrews viii. 12.

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## SERMON XIX.

FOR

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

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MINISTERIAL EARNESTNESS.

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2 Corinthians vi. 1.

WE THEN AS WORKERS TOGETHER *WITH HIM*,  
BESEECH YOU ALSO THAT YE RECEIVE NOT  
THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

THE nature of the message of the gospel, and the character borne by those who delivered it in the infancy of the Christian church, are the subjects to which our attention is directed in the Epistle for this day, subjects which it becomes the ministers of Christ in all ages particularly to lay to heart. This portion of scripture seems to have been selected on account of this being one of the seasons called Ember weeks, in which the prayers of the church are requested on behalf of those who are to be admitted into the sacred ministry of the church.

As the character of the ministers of the gospel of Christ is the principal topic brought before us, let us consider this in the *first* place, and then,

*Secondly*, The subject of their ministry; and

*Thirdly*, The importance of receiving the message of the gospel.

May the Spirit of God bring home His word to our hearts and consciences, that we may *not receive the grace of God in vain*, but that our characters may be such as become the people of God.

The apostle *first* calls the ministers or ambassadors for Christ, *workers together*, or fellow-labourers, to point out the harmony or love which subsisted between them. The words *with him* are in italics, which shows that they are not in the original language, but are inserted by the translators. They appear to me to be quite unnecessary, and indeed to give a wrong meaning. The apostle's address is literally, *We then*, labouring together, *beseech you*, &c. The ministers of Christ are all fellow-labourers one with another. They are not fellows with God in any sense. He is indeed graciously pleased to work with them, or as the apostle describes it, to *give the increase* to their planting or watering; or to make their labours effectual; but they have no pretension whatever to set up themselves on an equality with Him in any respect. While the office of the ministry is magnified as the appointment of God for the benefit of men, as the

apostle speaks of it at the close of the preceding chapter, it must ever be confessed respecting the instruments employed, *Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*<sup>39</sup> While the apostle was in labours most abundant, so that he said, *In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles,* yet he adds, *though I be nothing.*<sup>40</sup> He who thought himself *nothing* in the sight of God, could have had no idea that his words would have been interpreted as though he called himself God's fellow-labourer. His own insignificance in the Divine presence was ever before his mind, and his infinite inferiority to Him who had called him by His grace to be a labourer in His vineyard, in order to carry on the purposes of His goodness and mercy for the salvation of sinners, among whom he regarded himself as the chief. The terms which he has used are such as express the humble views which he had of himself, whether he called himself an ambassador for Christ, or His apostle or messenger, His herald, minister, or servant.

In speaking of the character which belongs to the labourers in the vineyard of God, that which he first mentions is, *Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.* He was fearful of putting any stumbling block in the way of his

<sup>39</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 7.

<sup>40</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 11.

hearers, that might hinder them from receiving the doctrine which he taught. It is to be expected that people will be disposed to find fault with that ministry which points out to them their awful state as sinners against God, and their danger of eternal perdition; notwithstanding the Divinely-appointed remedy is proposed to them at the same time, or the way of deliverance from *the wrath to come*. It is needful therefore that the conduct of the ministers of Christ should be most exemplary, that those who regard them with disapprobation may have no evil thing to say of them; and that they should avoid giving needless offence, so that no offence may be taken with them, except *the offence of the cross*,<sup>41</sup> which it is their duty to bear.

Those who deliver the message of the gospel to their fellow-creatures, are *in all things* to approve themselves *as the ministers of God*, that their character may in every respect be consistent with their profession. At the same time, the hearers of the word of God should recollect that *this treasure* is committed to *earthen vessels*,<sup>42</sup> to frail and sinful *men*, who *are of like passions with*<sup>43</sup> others, and should therefore make every possible allowance for them; and not charge their frailties on the message which they deliver.

The manner in which the apostles of Christ

<sup>41</sup> Galatians v. 11.    <sup>42</sup> 2 Corinthians iv. 7.    <sup>43</sup> Acts xiv. 15.

approved themselves *as the ministers of God*, was, *in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings*. Much patience was indeed requisite for them, when they were called to endure opposition and privation in every form; when afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, and imprisonment, continually awaited them; when tumults were frequently excited against them, notwithstanding they were most peaceably disposed, and were anxious only to publish the gospel of peace for the promotion of the best interests of mankind, comprehending both the temporal and eternal welfare of those who heard them. The zeal for the cause of God and the good of men which animated these ministers of His word, engaged them *in labours, in watchings, in fastings*. They voluntarily exposed themselves to privations, which they need not otherwise have sustained.

They approved themselves also *by pureness*. Having their hearts purified by faith in Christ, all impurity and vice was banished from their conduct. Immorality is totally inconsistent with a Christian profession. Above all should the ministers of God *keep themselves pure*; as the apostle says in the beginning of the following chapter: *Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of*



*God.*<sup>44</sup> Immorality of conduct is a convincing proof that the heart is not right with God, and therefore is not to be endured in those who profess to *teach* others *the good and the right way.*<sup>45</sup> We must walk in the right way ourselves, if we would persuade others to do it. Unless precept be enforced by example, it will be of little use. The superior excellence of the doctrine of the gospel of Christ will never be rightly appreciated, unless it be adorned by consistency of conduct in those who teach it, as well as in those who profess to believe it.

The apostles approved themselves also *by knowledge*, especially by their knowledge of the word of God, the holy scriptures of the Old Testament. They were not ignorant ministers who taught they knew not what; but although they were Divinely inspired, they searched the scriptures, to know the mind and will of God as it was therein revealed; and they proved the truth of the doctrine which they taught, by referring to what had been written by the *holy men of God* of old, who *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*<sup>46</sup>

They approved themselves likewise *by long-suffering* under misapprehension and reproach, persecution and affliction; *by kindness* in their whole deportment; *by the Holy Ghost*, or by

<sup>44</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 1.    <sup>45</sup> 1 Samuel xii. 23.    <sup>46</sup> 2 Peter i. 21.

exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit in their life and conduct; and ascribing all holiness to His sacred influence upon their souls; *by love unfeigned* to their Christian brethren in particular, and to mankind in general, manifested by promoting their best interests; *by the word of truth*, speaking only *the truth as it is in Jesus*,<sup>47</sup> and referring continually to the lively oracles of the Old Testament, for the confirmation of the truth which they taught, having it for their standard both in doctrine and practice; *by the power of God*, on which they relied for success in their ministry, knowing that He must give the increase, or they would plant and water in vain; *by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left*. They *cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light*; they *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and made not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*.<sup>48</sup> They *put on the whole armour of God, that they might be able to withstand in the evil day, against the wiles of the devil*.<sup>47</sup> Such was the conduct of these holy men, whereby they approved themselves *in all things as the ministers of God*.

The apostle proceeds to mention the return which they met with from mankind for this conduct. *By honour and dishonour*. By some they were treated with honour and respect; by others

<sup>47</sup> Ephesians iv. 21; vi. 11, 12.      <sup>48</sup> Romans xiii. 12, 14.

with dishonour and reproach. *By evil report and good report.* Some spoke evil of them, others spoke well of them. *As deceivers and yet true.* Many were disposed to say of them what was said of our Saviour Himself, *He deceiveth the people*; but they were in reality *true men*, whose object was not to promote their own selfish ends, but the dissemination of the truth of God. *As unknown and yet well known.* Many shunned their acquaintance, fearing to be involved in the obloquy and persecution to which they were exposed; and treated them as obscure persons, who were unworthy of notice, although they knew well the excellency of their character: others openly acknowledged, and highly approved of them. *As dying, and behold we live.* They were in continual danger of being put to death by their opponents, who frequently went about to kill them; but by the watchful care of Divine Providence, and to their own astonishment, they were preserved alive in the midst of the dangers with which they were surrounded. *As chastened, but not killed.* They were severely beaten on many occasions, and even stoned; but still the malice of their enemies was not permitted to prevail to their destruction. They seemed to have great reason for continual sorrow and heaviness, in consequence of the persecutions to which they were exposed; but though they were *as sorrowful, yet they were*

*always rejoicing. They rejoiced in the Lord always, in the midst of their troubles and afflictions. As poor, yet making many rich. They were poor as to this world's goods, but notwithstanding they were the means of making many rich for eternity. As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.* Though they appeared to be in a destitute condition, yet in possessing Christ, who has all things in heaven and earth under His controul, and will not suffer His people to want any thing that is really for their good, they had all things that they could desire.

Such is the description given both of the real and the reputed characters of the persons who were first called by the grace of God, and appointed and commissioned by Him to publish the message of reconciliation in His name to their perishing fellow-sinners; and such is the treatment which they received from the world, in the fulfilment of the ministry with which they were entrusted. The ministers of Christ in all ages must be prepared to follow the steps of His apostles, in the discharge of the duty which devolves upon them; and they need not be surprised if they should meet with similar treatment to that which the first ministers of the gospel experienced, if they should be required to go through evil report as well as good report. Blessed be God, those who make known the word of life are not exposed in this day, in our

country, to the persecutions which met the apostles every where. May we take occasion, from the facilities which are afforded us, to be zealous in every good word and work, to the glory of God and the benefit of all around us. Let us now consider,

*Secondly*, The subject of the ministry of the first ambassadors for Christ. It was *to testify the gospel of the grace of God*. This evidently means the same as *the word of reconciliation* mentioned in the latter part of the preceding chapter. But the apostle gives a further explanation of it in the verse following the text, in which he brings forward an argument from the Old Testament in support of his exhortation, *For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee*. This is a quotation from the book of the prophet Isaiah. The contemplation of the promises of God contained in His word, filled the apostle with holy rapture and zeal, so that he exclaimed with admiration, *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*. From whence we may infer that *the accepted time* is that in which God hears the prayers of His people who call upon Him through Christ; and *the day of salvation* is that in which He comes to their aid, and succours them in their spiritual warfare. And therefore the subjects which *the gospel of the grace of God* brings before mankind, are those

of reconciliation with God, acceptance in His sacred presence, intercourse and communion with Him as the Hearer of prayer, and the Divine aid of His Holy Spirit, through which present and eternal salvation is bestowed. What unspeakable blessings are these! Let us meditate upon them, and may we enjoy the consolation which is to be derived from them.

The gospel of *the grace of God* announces reconciliation with God to His rebellious creatures. Its gracious proclamation is, that *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.*<sup>49</sup> Its ministers therefore call upon their fellow-sinners to *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,*<sup>50</sup> that they may be reconciled to God. They state, that *God hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,*<sup>49</sup> or that an atonement has been provided by God, and made by Christ; and that whosoever places his reliance on the merit of the obedience unto death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for pardon, shall be freely forgiven all his iniquities. Such is the gracious declaration of Divine truth, which the ministers of Christ are commanded to promulgate in the name of their Lord and Master; and whosoever believeth this with all his heart, shall be saved. The invitation is given

<sup>49</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19, 21.    <sup>50</sup> Acts xvi. 31.    <sup>51</sup> Col. i. 23.



to all mankind; the message is commanded to be delivered *to every creature under heaven*<sup>51</sup> who is capable of receiving it; and whosoever is willing and desirous to take the benefit of it is welcome to come and *receive, that His joy may be full; for him that cometh unto Me, said our Saviour, I will in no wise cast out.*

Have you then, brethren, rightly considered the nature of this message of reconciliation which God has sent to mankind? It is worthy of our most serious regard. Let not any overlook it, or neglect it. If you really desire to partake of its benefits; you are as welcome to them as to the air you breathe, or to the light and heat of the sun. There is no obstacle but what arises from yourselves. God has provided a ransom for sin, and you are directed to seek for an application of its benefits to your soul, with an assurance that seeking you shall find. *Behold, now is the accepted time*, the time of grace, in which He hears the prayers of them that call upon Him through the appointed Mediator, and will vouchsafe an answer of pardon and peace. *Behold, now is the accepted time*, in which the Lord waiteth to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy. He calls to the children of men, *Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*<sup>52</sup> Though you have gone on long in iniquity,

though you may have sinned with a high hand, yet if you humbly and earnestly seek pardon through Christ, He will not cast out your prayer, when it goeth not out of feigned lips, but He will give you the blessing which you implore at His hands. And further, if you dread the power of sin for the future, from experience of the dominion that it has held over you in times past, *Behold, now is the day of salvation*, in which you may obtain Divine aid, or succour, from on high, to enable you to overcome all your spiritual enemies. Without this aid, your adversaries will be too powerful for you, but through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord, His believing people will be made *more than conquerors*<sup>52</sup> over every enemy; they shall *triumph through Christ*.<sup>53</sup> Not only shall present salvation or deliverance be afforded in the time of their need, but they shall hereafter receive *the end of their faith, the eternal salvation of their souls*.<sup>54</sup> This is the glorious consummation which awaits those who receive the grace of God in truth. The reception of the gospel of the grace of God so influences the heart, that they are constrained by love and gratitude to Him who has had mercy on them, to devote themselves to His service, and to live to His glory; and to implore the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit to

<sup>52</sup> Isa. i. 18.   <sup>53</sup> Rom. viii. 37.   <sup>54</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 14.   <sup>55</sup> 1 Pet. i. 9.

enable them to *walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*<sup>56</sup> and to persevere until they arrive at the end of their earthly course, and receive the glorious prize, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him, in everlasting life and felicity.

Such is the great blessedness which *the grace of God* sets before the children of men, to be enjoyed by believers in the Lord Jesus Christ both here and hereafter. It is the knowledge of the word of reconciliation which brings peace to the conscience of the penitent sinner. This assures him of acceptance in the Divine presence, through Jesus Christ our Mediator and Advocate; in reliance on whose merits, it is his privilege to maintain intercourse and communion with God, as the Hearer of prayer; while *in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* he makes *known his requests unto God.*<sup>57</sup> And this encourages him to expect Divine aid in every time of need, in the season of danger and difficulty; to support him under all his trials, and in his conflicts with the enemies of his soul; and this affords him a good hope of obtaining eternal happiness in the beatific vision of God.

The unspeakable blessedness derived from the knowledge of the grace of God in truth, made

<sup>56</sup> Col. i. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Phil. iv. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.

the apostle Paul anxious to communicate it far and wide. He felt deeply the importance of the message of the gospel, and of its being received by those to whom it was addressed. This is the *Last* thing to be noticed. The sense which he had of its vast importance, led him to address his hearers in the most affectionate manner, *We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.* His concern for their welfare induced him to press home the subject in this way. What more powerful appeal could be made to their feelings? What language could express more strongly his sense of the vast importance of the message with which he was entrusted? With similar emotions should all the ministers of Christ endeavour to affect the minds of their hearers. Allow us, brethren, to be importunate for your eternal welfare. *We watch for your souls, as those that must give an account.*<sup>58</sup> We must one day give an account of our labours, and you must also give an account of your attendance on the means of grace, and the ordinances of the house of God. Examine yourselves then, we beseech you, whether you have received the grace of God in truth; or whether it has been preached to you in vain. There is great danger in neglecting the gospel of Christ. *To receive the grace of God in vain,* is to admit the truth of the gospel, without having the heart affected by it. It is to have the form of godliness without the power of it. It

is to hear the word of God without being saved by the knowledge of it from the love of sin, the power of Satan, and the spirit of the world. It is to hear the word of God without possessing a good hope through faith in Christ that we shall obtain eternal salvation in the life to come.

Is there not reason to fear that many hearers of the word of God are in this awful state, *hearers only*, and not *doers of the word*, who come to the house of God and hear, and go away without reflection and without prayer; without seeking that the blessing of God may accompany His word to their souls? If the day of our gracious visitation be neglected, what will become of us hereafter? The same word of God which reveals His grace and salvation, reveals also *the wrath to come*. If we should be *not far from the kingdom of God*, and yet should be excluded from its blessedness for ever, how dreadful would it be! What a grievous disappointment will ensue to those who *receive the grace of God in vain*. May we all be preserved from making so fatal a mistake. May earnest prayer and serious self-examination succeed to carelessness and indifference about our eternal salvation. May every one here present be anxious to *know the grace of God in truth*, and to live under its blessed influence. Oh, let us seek grace to enable us so to live, that when we are called hence, we may go to be *ever with the Lord*.

## SERMON XX.

FOR

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

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THE CHRISTIAN WALK.

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1 Thessalonians iv. 1.

FURTHERMORE, THEN, WE BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, AND EXHORT YOU BY THE LORD JESUS, THAT AS YE HAVE RECEIVED OF US HOW YE OUGHT TO WALK AND TO PLEASE GOD, SO YE WOULD ABOUND MORE AND MORE.

IN the Epistle for this day, the conduct which becometh the gospel of Christ in a very important particular is plainly stated. The apostle John has summed up the principles by which all mankind are naturally actuated, as consisting in *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*<sup>59</sup> It has been said that it was by means of these things our first parent was tempted to disobedience, since the reason given for the conduct of Eve was, that she *saw that the*



*tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.*<sup>60</sup>

It has also been observed, that the devil's temptations of our Saviour in the wilderness may be resolved into the same particulars. He endeavoured first to stir up a desire of animal gratification, by tempting the Lord Jesus to convert stones into bread; then to entrap Him by the desire of the eyes, when he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and afterwards to excite the pride of life in His mind, when he desired Him to display Himself as being indeed the Messiah, by casting Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, into the midst of the multitude who were assembled to worship at the festival. By considering the answers which our Saviour gave to Satan when He was tempted, we may learn how we should act when we are assaulted in each of these respects by the enemy of our souls.<sup>61</sup> In the word of God we shall always find what is requisite to fortify our minds against the temptations of our spiritual enemies.

In the text we have a view of Christian principles and Christian practice combined together. What God hath joined, let no man put asunder. They who set up Christian morals independently of Christian principle, erect a baseless fabric,

<sup>59</sup> 1 John ii. 16. <sup>60</sup> Gen. iii. 6. <sup>61</sup> Luke iv. 3—11. <sup>62</sup> James ii. 26.

which will fall upon their own heads, and involve them in its ruin. They who talk of Christian doctrines without inculcating Christian practice, know not what they say nor whereof they affirm. They are like persons who contend that a dead corpse is a living body. St. James says to such, *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*<sup>62</sup> Let us beware of both these fatal errors. The text points out to us,

*First*, The Christian principle which operates in the mind of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Secondly*, The Christian practice which flows from it, which is enlarged upon in the remainder of the Epistle for this day.

*Thirdly*, The object proposed by the Christian's conduct.

Let it be our prayer that the Spirit of God would be our Teacher, that we may have a right understanding of Divine truth, and may not be hearers only, but also doers of the word, and be blessed in our deed.

*First*, The powerful motive adduced by the apostle for the purpose of exciting Christians to universal obedience to the will of God, or the principle which operates in the minds of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, is brought forward when he says, *We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you, by the Lord Jesus.* The debt of gratitude due to the Divine Redeemer was a topic which he knew would have the most powerful

effect upon the minds of His believing people. The nature of the obligation they were under to the Lord Jesus, he had mentioned in a few words at the close of the first chapter, when he spoke of Him as having *delivered us from the wrath to come*. When the greatness of this deliverance is considered, what an influence must it have over the minds of those who are interested in it. *The wrath to come!* What dreadful words are these! Who is duly sensible of their import? When we consider the awful description which is given of the state of those who are involved in it, it is enough to make the ears of them that hear it to tingle. It is said of them, *The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night.*<sup>63</sup> The very possibility of experiencing such misery as is here described, would, we might think, cause the utmost anxiety in the minds of all who hear that there is any danger of their being exposed to it, an anxiety *to flee from the wrath to come*. But we see continually that this is not the case. The wicked still do wickedly, notwithstanding they

<sup>63</sup> Revelation xiv. 10, 11.

are warned of their danger. The terrors of the Almighty do not make them afraid. As the royal preacher observes, *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*<sup>64</sup> Such is the awful state of the multitude of mankind. We are all *by nature the children of wrath*, exposed to the wrath of God; and therefore, unless we are interested in the salvation of the Lord Jesus, the only deliverer *from the wrath to come*, we cannot be saved from it, we cannot escape it. Except we *repent and believe the gospel*, we must perish everlastingly. So the word of God declares. Oh! that all our minds were solemnized by this affecting truth, that we might every one of us earnestly implore from Him, whose property is always to have mercy, that repentance and faith which He is exalted to give, and will not refuse to any needy suppliant at His footstool, who humbly and importunately seeks to obtain the blessing. *It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*<sup>65</sup> He came to *redeem us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us.*<sup>66</sup> He was crucified for our offences, and in consequence of His sufferings and death, *the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*<sup>67</sup> But unless we

<sup>64</sup> Eccl. viii. 11. <sup>65</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15. <sup>66</sup> Gal. iii. 13. <sup>67</sup> Rom. vi. 23.

put our trust in His sufferings and death for our redemption ; unless we are sensible of our obligations to Him for becoming our substitute, and suffering the wrath of God instead of guilty man ; and it be our earnest desire and prayer to partake of the blessings which are bestowed in and through Him, both in this life and in that which is to come ; in vain is it that we bear the name of Christians. A Christian is one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, who hopes for pardon through His blood, who trusts in His merits for reconciliation and peace with God, who relies upon Him alone for salvation from sin and death everlasting. If this be our character, the appeal in the text will be responded to by us.

When the consideration of the vastness of our obligations to the Lord Jesus is brought before us, it will powerfully constrain us to comply with the exhortation given by the apostle to believers in Him ; which is to be noticed in the

*Second* place, as showing the Christian practice which flows from the reception of Christian doctrine. *To walk so as to please God* and therein to *abound more and more*, will be the object which we shall propose to ourselves continually, in consequence of knowing *what commandments* were given us *by the Lord Jesus*. Walking means, in scripture language, the whole course of our behaviour and conduct in life, particularly the active part of it, and that which is under the

observation of our fellow-creatures. This in Christians is to be regulated by the commandments of the Lord Jesus, or in other words by the will of God, as the apostle proceeds to call these commandments. *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification*, or that His people should be separated from the pollutions of *the world that lieth in wickedness*, and be set apart to His service and glory, both in their souls and bodies. This the apostle thought it needful to inculcate most especially on account of the state of the heathen world, in which sensual gratification was scarcely regarded as a crime. He therefore descends to particulars; *that ye should abstain from fornication*, or from gratifying the sinful lusts of the flesh. This sin was so common, that the apostle describes the Gentiles as being insensible to the wickedness of it; *who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*<sup>68</sup> This crime constituted in some instances even a part of their religious worship; and the writings of the heathen poets continually represented their fancied deities as being engaged in the most infamous practices of this description. Hence it was absolutely necessary that the evil of it should be plainly declared in the word of God; and Christians exhorted, *that every one of*

<sup>68</sup> Ephesians iv. 19.



*you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, or, to avoid fornication; in order to which the apostle says at another time, Let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband,*<sup>69</sup> in an honourable connexion, not giving way to the unruly passions of the corrupt heart of man.

And not only is the outward conduct to be thus regulated, but also the thoughts and desires and inclinations of the mind; *Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God.* Impurity of heart and mind is most offensive to God, as well as the practice of what He has forbidden. Both were common among the heathen, but both are to be avoided and abhorred by the disciples of the Lord Jesus. He requires of them, *that no man go beyond or defraud his brother in any (or rather, in this) matter, because that the Lord is the Avenger of all such; as we also have forewarned and testified,* says the apostle; which he did when he declared that, *Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*<sup>70</sup> He anxiously pressed this point, for the purpose of bringing it home to the consciences of those who were living in the midst of an ungodly world; that, seeing how abominable all such conduct is in the sight of God, they might utterly detest and abhor this

<sup>69</sup> 1 Corinthians vii. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ephesians v. 6.

cursed thing, which is so pregnant with evil consequences. He declared therefore that *God hath not called us unto uncleanness but unto holiness. He hath called His people to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*<sup>71</sup> And therefore *He that despiseth, despiseth not man but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit.* Here then we learn that Christian practice consists in holiness of heart and life, which believers in Christ are enabled to follow by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them for this purpose, to purify their hearts, and to enable them to mortify their earthly members, the sinful lusts of the flesh.

Who that knows any thing of the state of society in our professedly Christian land could imagine that a sin, which abounds, alas, so greatly among us, is so pointedly condemned in the word of God; and that such awful denunciations against those who commit it are contained in the sacred volume? Surely this affords sufficient proof that in the midst of much Christian profession there is a deficiency of Christian principle; for if those who call themselves Christians were under the influence of the faith of Christ, and were led by the Spirit of God, their hearts would be purified, and their conduct sanctified. Of little benefit

<sup>71</sup> 2 Corinthians vii. 1.

will it be to hear the word of God, unless we also obey the gospel. St. James therefore exhorts us, *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*<sup>72</sup> Our Saviour asked those who professed to follow Him, *Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say.* And He declared, *Not every one that saith unto Me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father, which is in heaven.* Impurity of mind renders communion with God impossible. The Psalmist said, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*<sup>73</sup> The *pure in heart* alone, or those who refrain from indulging impure thoughts in their minds, as well as from committing impure deeds,—they alone *shall see God*;<sup>74</sup> they alone shall enjoy His spiritual presence on earth, and the beatific vision of His glory in heaven. *Without following holiness, or earnestly seeking after purity of heart and life, and refraining from the indulgence of impure imaginations and practices, no man shall see the Lord.*<sup>75</sup> If a profession of faith in Christ do not purify the heart, it is of no avail; it is only an

<sup>72</sup> James i. 22—24. <sup>73</sup> Ps. lxvi. 18. <sup>74</sup> Matt. v. 8. <sup>75</sup> Heb. xii. 14.

empty, unprofitable speculation. Its possessor has merely the *knowledge* which *puffeth up*, and not the *charity* or love which *edifieth*,<sup>76</sup> or buildeth up the true Christian. Those who are really *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus* are a holy people to the Lord their God, and will *follow holiness*. They cannot live in sin allowedly or habitually. The characteristic which our Saviour has given of His people is, *Ye shall know them by their fruits*. In illustration of which He asks, *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*<sup>77</sup> If the power of godliness be not apparent in the walk and conduct, the love of Christ cannot reign in the heart; and where there is no real love to Christ, a profession of *religion is vain*.

But in order that we may be enabled in some measure to judge of our own state before God, since outward morality is easily attainable where a profession of religion prevails, and obtains general credit, the apostle shows us,

*Thirdly*, The object proposed by the Christian in his whole conduct; and this is two-fold, namely, *to please God*, and *to abound more and more in walking so as to please Him*. *To please God* in all things is the desire of His people, in like manner as a child is desirous to please his parent. We naturally endeavour to please those

<sup>76</sup> 1 Corinthians viii. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew vii. 16.

whom we love and reverence. An affectionate child finds no difficulty in doing what he knows will please a kind and tender parent. It is a delight to him to act according to his parent's wishes, and even sometimes to anticipate them, as a proof of his regard, and his desire to please. Thus it will be also with the child of God. To please God will be his first consideration. And in order that he may do the will of God, he will seek to know it. As the will of God is revealed in His holy word, the child of God will *search the scriptures*, that he may learn from them to choose the good and refuse the evil. He will read them with prayer for Divine illumination, that he may rightly apprehend and understand what he reads, and for Divine grace to enable him to put it in practice. When tempted to turn aside out of the good ways of God, he will implore Divine aid to hold up his goings in the paths which his heavenly Father has marked out for his children to walk in, that he may not go astray either to the right hand or to the left. And not satisfied with any present attainments, he will press forward with an anxious desire to know more of the will of God, to love his heavenly Father in Christ Jesus with more ardour and affection, and to live in more entire obedience to His will in all things. It is pleasing to God that His people should seek to be made acquainted with His will, as it is revealed in His

blessed word; and that their hearts should be under its influence, that they should love His word, and make it the subject of their continual meditation.

But it is also important that their walk, or conduct in life, should be governed by it, that it should be manifest to the world that they really renounce what He has forbidden, and live in obedience to what He has commanded; and that therein they *should abound more and more*, that as they go forward in their religious profession, they should appear more decidedly, and more confidently and openly on the Lord's side, as the opposers of every thing that is evil, especially in *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*; and as the promoters of every thing that is good and profitable unto their fellow-creatures. Let us seek grace from God to enable us so to *walk as to please Him*, and therein to *abound more and more*. As we are unable of ourselves to do this, unable "to walk in the commandments of God and to serve Him without His special grace," He has graciously promised to give to them that ask Him His Holy Spirit, to enable them to fulfil what they are unable to do of themselves. If then we pray that His blessed influences may be vouchsafed to us and rest upon us, He will work in us both to will and to do what is pleasing in His sight; in consequence of which, *the fruit of the Spirit which is in all goodness and righteous-*



*ness and truth,*<sup>78</sup> will appear in our conduct to the glory of His holy name. The believer in Christ who seeks Divine aid, being the habitation of God through the Spirit, shall be upheld continually in the good ways of God, and be kept from falling into sin, or running into danger.

Happy are they who take the word and will of God for the rule of their faith and practice, and who propose to themselves, as their main object, *to walk so as to please God* by the assistance of His Holy Spirit. The God of their mercies *will never leave them nor forsake them, so that they may boldly say, The Lord is my helper.*<sup>79</sup> He will not suffer the enemies of their souls to obtain the advantage over them; but will keep them as the apple of the eye, will hide them under the shadow of His wings. He will be their shield and their exceeding great reward; and, after having guided them in safety through all the storms and troubles of this mortal life, He will carry them at length into the haven of eternal rest, to rejoice in His salvation for evermore.

Let us endeavour, before we conclude, to bring home the subject to our consciences. The principle which operates in the mind of the true Christian has been set before us; let us ask ourselves, Are we under its influence? When we

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians v. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Hebrews xiii. 6.

are besought, entreated, exhorted *by the Lord Jesus*, by the consideration of what He has done and suffered for us, when He humbled Himself to be *the propitiation for our sins*,<sup>80</sup> that through Him we might be pardoned and reconciled to God, and reinstated in His favour, what effect does this consideration produce upon our minds? Has the love of Christ so affected our hearts that we do truly love Him in return? If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he can have neither part nor lot in His great salvation. Can we appeal in humility to the Searcher of hearts, *Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee?*<sup>81</sup> If you fear to make this declaration, Do you really desire to love Him above all things? Are you anxious that this question should be settled between God and your own consciences? Do you pray earnestly that you may be enabled by His grace to love Him supremely, that *the love of God* may be *shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost* being given to you?<sup>82</sup> If this be not the case, it is to be feared that you are unacquainted with the first principles of the gospel of Christ; for if you were in any degree sensible of your obligations to the Lord Jesus, you could not but desire and pray that He might be the object of your supreme affection.

<sup>80</sup> 1 John ii. 2.

<sup>81</sup> John xxi. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Romans v. 5.

If you think that you do love Him in some measure, however feebly, ask yourselves again, What influence does the exhortation in the text have over you? Do you consider *how you ought to walk and to please God*? Do you inquire continually with regard to your conduct, Is this pleasing to God? Are you anxious to be pleasing to Him at all times, to live as in His sight, as under His eye, realising His presence, that you may live to His glory? This may be called the criterion, the test of the Christian character.

Let it be our anxious desire *to please God* in all things; *to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life;*<sup>83</sup> that *He may stablish our hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*<sup>84</sup> Let us be diligent in prayer for the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit to be vouchsafed to us, that we may love the Lord Jesus and keep His commandments, that we may avoid all sin in thought, word, and deed, and may abound more and more in what is pleasing to God; that we may glorify Him in body, soul, and spirit, here on earth, and be made partakers of His everlasting salvation when time shall be no more.

<sup>83</sup> Philippians ii. 15.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Thessalonians iii. 13.

# SERMON XXI.

FOR

## THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S EXAMPLE.

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Ephesians v. 1, 2.

BE YE THEREFORE FOLLOWERS OF GOD, AS DEAR CHILDREN; AND WALK IN LOVE, AS CHRIST ALSO HATH LOVED US, AND HATH GIVEN HIMSELF FOR US, AN OFFERING AND A SACRIFICE TO GOD FOR A SWEET SMELLING SAVOUR.

THE season of Lent being regarded as a time for special humiliation before God, and renunciation of the dominion of our spiritual enemies, and particularly of self-denial respecting the evil desires and propensities of our fallen nature, the same topic is brought before us in the Epistle for this day, as that which was considered on the last Sunday.

The Epistle commences with an exhortation to the children of God to be conformed to the image and likeness of their heavenly Father, as that likeness was exhibited by our Lord Jesus Christ, *the image of the invisible God*.<sup>85</sup> The word rendered *followers* literally means *imitators*. If we are the children of God, our Saviour says to us, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*;<sup>86</sup> or, *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful*;<sup>87</sup> that is, Be imitators of Him, that thus you may manifest yourselves to *be the children of your Father which is in heaven*,<sup>86</sup> by the likeness which you bear to Him. To such conduct the apostle had directed the particular attention of the Ephesians at the close of the preceding chapter, *Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*. The children of God will thus be imitators of their heavenly Father. Such He calls His *dear*, His beloved *children*. How wonderful is it that the God of heaven should so denominate any of the sinful children of men. How grateful ought they to be for this high distinction conferred upon them; and what anxiety does it become them to evince, that they should *walk worthy of God, who hath called them unto His kingdom and glory*;<sup>88</sup> or that they should, as it is expressed in

<sup>85</sup> Col. i. 15. <sup>86</sup> Matt. v. 48, 45. <sup>87</sup> Luke vi. 36. <sup>88</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 12.

the text, *Walk in love*: and especially so since they have such a pattern to follow as is here exhibited: *As Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.* What love was this! It was *love strong as death*; love which led Him to give up Himself to a painful and shameful death, that He might *make reconciliation for iniquity*,<sup>89</sup> and be *the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him*.<sup>90</sup> With what gratitude of heart does it become us ever to reflect upon this love of Christ at all seasons, but especially during this season of humiliation, in which we are called upon to look forward to the commemoration of the great event of His bitter death and passion, as the substitute for His guilty and rebellious creatures.

The apostle makes mention of the sacrifice of Christ for sin, in order to enforce his exhortation to self-denial and mortification of the deeds of the body. *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.* Such things are not to be the subject of conversation, much less to be indulged in by those who *are a holy people unto the Lord their God*.<sup>91</sup> Their minds are not to be allowed to dwell upon these subjects; their tongues are not to be employed in speaking of what is so

<sup>89</sup> Dan. ix. 24.    <sup>90</sup> Heb. v. 9.    <sup>91</sup> Deut. xiv. 2. 1 Pet. i. 15.



●contaminating. *Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which is not convenient ; but rather giving of thanks.* Filthy, idle, and loose conversation is altogether unbecoming a Christian profession. Instead of the mouth overflowing with any thing of this description, the Christian has abundant cause for expressing his gratitude or thankfulness to his heavenly Father for His unbounded goodness and mercy towards him. Talking on the subjects referred to is to be avoided, because of the dreadful consequences of living in the practice of the crimes here forbidden. *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous or libidinous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ or of God.* The heathen world was overrun with these abominations ; and it was therefore necessary to impress the subject deeply upon the minds of those who were dwelling in the midst of people who openly and shamelessly committed them, that *the end of these things is death*, not only temporal but eternal ; entire exclusion from the kingdom of God. But how needful was it also that this strong language respecting the evil and danger of those sins should be left on record in the word of God ; for, alas ! how are countries, called Christian, overrun with these vices, in like manner as the heathen world was, if not quite to the same excess.

As these sins are so gratifying to the corrupt

nature of mankind, the apostle speaks further and most solemnly on the subject. *Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.* There must be no compromise in this matter. The gratification of the lusts of the flesh brings the wrath of God upon those who indulge themselves in it. Ungodly men may palliate and excuse these offences, as though they were of a venial nature; but they are viewed with abhorrence by Almighty God, and He will punish those who dare to commit them in defiance of His prohibition. It is possible for persons to be in the habit of attending on the ordinances of the house of God, and yet to live in the commission of sins of this description. How awful is it thus to attempt to serve God and sin together. The religious profession of such persons will rise up in judgment against them. However they may *flatter themselves in their own eyes*, their *iniquity will be found to be hateful.*<sup>92</sup> Let it be our prayer that we may *abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good;*<sup>93</sup> that we may be kept from walking *in a way that is not good, after our own thoughts;*<sup>94</sup> from falling into sin or running aside into danger. Let not the multitude of offenders embolden us to sin against God; but let us remember that *God*

<sup>92</sup> Psalm xxxvi. 2.    <sup>93</sup> Romans xii. 9.    <sup>94</sup> Isaiah lxv. 2.

spared not the old world; but brought in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and at a later period turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah into ashes, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.<sup>95</sup> Let sinners take the warning that is given them, and not imagine that they may go on in sin with impunity.

The apostle proceeds, *Be not ye therefore partakers with them* who commit these sins. Ungodly men hesitate not to propose their own evil example for the imitation of those over whom they may have influence. Let young people especially, who are exposed to the evil example and solicitations of such persons, beware how they adopt their wicked practices, and involve themselves in the guilt of their transgressions.

But the persons whom the apostle addressed had been heathens, and were on that account the more liable to fall into sins which they had formerly committed without fear or shame. He therefore reminds them of their former condition, and of the change which had taken place in them. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.* They had formerly lived in sin, and in ignorance of God, *darkness had blinded their eyes*; but they had been enlightened with the knowledge of the gospel of Christ, through the preaching of the apostle; and *God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness had shined in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge*

*of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*<sup>96</sup> They were therefore *the children of light and the children of the day; they were not of the night, nor of darkness.*<sup>97</sup>

This being the case, they were exhorted to *walk as children of the light.* It was needful that their conduct should be suitable to the change which had taken place in their character and condition, that they should walk before God and men as the children of God, *proving what is acceptable unto the Lord,* or giving proof by their conduct that *God had not called them unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*<sup>97</sup> The conduct which is pleasing in His sight and acceptable to Him, is that which is produced by the influence of His Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of His believing people. *For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.* Here is goodness as opposed to wickedness; righteousness as opposed to disobedience; and truth as opposed to error. The children of men naturally follow after wickedness, being *dead in trespasses and sins*; and live in allowed disobedience to the word and will of God; deceiving themselves by the adoption of erroneous opinions, which they are disposed most obstinately to defend. In opposition to this spirit and conduct, the children of God are to follow after goodness. They are

<sup>95</sup> 2 Peter ii. 5, 6.   <sup>96</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.   <sup>97</sup> 1 Thess. v. 5; iv. 7.

to live in obedience to what God has commanded ; and to take the word of truth for their guide and directory at all times. They are to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them.* They are not to keep company with those who practise wickedness, but if such come in their way, or they are under the necessity of associating with them, they are to endeavour to embrace the opportunity of this intercourse for reprovng them, that they may be led to repentance in consequence of being *warned to flee from the wrath to come.* Those who openly talk in a corrupting manner are to be openly rebuked, that the spreading of their evil communication may be counteracted. But above all, their deeds of darkness are to be shunned. *For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.* It is awful to think that wicked men should dare to do in secret what every body should be ashamed to speak of ; but that they should boast of such deeds of darkness is truly horrible. Yet such persons are, alas, to be met with. When they do broach their daring wickedness, the best way to prevent the contagion of their evil example is to exhibit the light of Divine truth, and to show that all sin is opposed to the word and will of God ; who will call the transgressors of His holy law to account for their evil conduct. *All things that are reprovved are made manifest by the light ; for*

*whatsoever doth make manifest is light.* It is by the exhibition of the light of God's holy word that the deformity of the works of darkness is manifested. This is to be exhibited, however, not by the lips only, but by the life of the true Christian. It is by being *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life,*<sup>98</sup> that the children of God will put to shame the practices of wicked men. Where the light of both Christian doctrine and practice shines, it will manifest the foulness of the works of darkness, and tend to repress them. As Christ is *the Light of the world*, where He shines darkness will flee away. He Himself declared, *I am the Light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*<sup>99</sup>

On which account the apostle adds, *Wherefore He*, or (according to the margin) *it*, the gospel, *saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.* Those who profess to have been awakened from the sleep of sin, or to have been raised from a death in trespasses and sins in which they were formerly involved, are to seek grace from Christ to enable them to live to His glory and show forth His praise, to manifest that they are alive to God,

<sup>98</sup> Philippians ii. 15.

<sup>99</sup> John viii. 12.



by letting their *light shine before men*, as being derived from Him. And since He has promised to give light to His waiting people, to shine into their hearts, to discover His glory to their souls, and to conform them to His image by His Spirit; it becomes them not to defile themselves with the evil that is in the world, but to abstain from all kinds of worldly excess, and to seek to know what is the will of God respecting themselves in every matter, that they may acquiesce in it, and may glorify Him in their bodies and in their spirits, which are His.

How delightful is the portraiture of Christianity, which is drawn and displayed in the word of God. It appears to have been designed to chase away all moral evil, and to promote all moral good. It leads the children of men to the source of real happiness, opens to their view a fulness of grace and truth in Christ Jesus, from which they may derive, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, grace to enable them to walk *in goodness and righteousness and truth* upon earth, and whereby they shall receive everlasting glory in the life to come. Were the power of godliness coextensive with the profession of Christianity, we should see nothing of the moral disorders which are continually brought under our view in the world. Godliness restrains all the unruly passions of the human mind, for it leads those who are under its influence to

*exercise themselves to have always a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward men.*

In reviewing the Epistle for this day, we have seen what is the conduct which becometh the children of God with regard to self-government, or self-denial in the lusts of the flesh most especially. Let us now consider more particularly,

*First*, The motives by which this conduct is enforced, as they are set before us in the text; and

*Secondly*, The exhortation which is immediately connected with them.

The motives are, *As Christ also hath loved us and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.* The love of Christ powerfully affected the mind of the apostle. He therefore spoke of it as the most influential topic that could be adduced. He had before said that he prayed for the persons to whom he wrote, *that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that they, being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.*<sup>1</sup> The love of Christ is a boundless subject, the immensity of which will never be exhausted even throughout eternity itself. It is a subject which fills heaven with wonder, which the angels of God contemplate with astonishment and admiration. They con-

temple the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward mankind with wonder and praise, while they ascribe *salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb.*<sup>2</sup> With what gratitude then ought the children of men, who were the objects of this love, to meditate upon it. *Christ hath loved us.* The eternal Son of God, who had *glory with the Father before the world was, who is before all things, and by whom all things consist;*<sup>3</sup> He manifested His love to the sinful children of men, by humbling Himself to take our nature, that He might become our Redeemer. The apostle says to the Corinthians, *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich. Poor indeed He became, when He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*<sup>4</sup> What an amazing condescension was it for God to become *manifest in the flesh!* We cannot conceive how such an event could possibly take place. But this fact is the foundation of Christianity. Our Saviour Himself said on the subject, *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* The love of God to man was displayed in the gift of His Son to

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii. 17—19.   <sup>2</sup> Rev. vii. 10.   <sup>3</sup> Col. i. 17.   <sup>4</sup> Phil. ii. 7.

become man ; the love of Christ appeared in His giving Himself for us, in willingly condescending to abase Himself to the lowest state of degradation, in order to raise us from our low and fallen state, and restore us to the Divine favour and reconciliation with God.

The purpose for which He gave Himself for us is mentioned. It was to be *an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour*. The two words here used may perhaps refer to, and at all events may be illustrated by the transactions of the great day of atonement, recorded in the sixteenth chapter of the book of Leviticus. On that occasion two goats were directed to be presented before the Lord, for a sin offering, one of which was slain as a sacrifice, and *upon the head of the other the priest was to lay both his hands, and confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat ; and then to send it away by a fit man into the wilderness*. And it is added, *The goat shall bear upon it all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited*, where it was set at liberty. In reference to this transfer of guilt, our Lord Jesus Christ was called *the Lamb of God which taketh, or carrieth, away the sin of the world*. And it is recorded of Him, that He *His ownself bare our sins in His own body on the tree ; and that He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*.<sup>5</sup> *The Lord laid on Him the*

*iniquity of us all,*<sup>6</sup> and in consequence of it He was *made a curse for us*, by means of which He *hath redeemed us from the curse of the law*; and the God of heaven declares respecting those who put their trust in the redemption of Christ, *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*<sup>5</sup> He suffered the punishment due to our transgressions. And His atonement was *a sweet smelling savour* before God: as it is stated that when Noah *offered burnt offerings unto the Lord* after the flood, *the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, though the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done.*<sup>7</sup> Thus by *the sweet smelling savour* of the *offering and sacrifice* of Christ, the curse and wrath of God is removed from His people, and pardon and peace are proclaimed to all who believe in His name.

The apostle speaks of this love of Christ with the utmost admiration to the Romans. He says that *Christ died for the ungodly.*<sup>8</sup> The wonder of this appears, in that *scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; but God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners*

<sup>5</sup> Heb. ix. 26; viii. 12. <sup>6</sup> Isa. liii. 6. <sup>7</sup> Gen. viii. 21. <sup>8</sup> Rom. v. 4-10.

*Christ died for us. For when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*<sup>9</sup> With what heartfelt gratitude to our Divine Redeemer ought the consideration of this subject to inspire us, and how powerfully ought it to influence us to render a willing obedience to all that is required of us in return for such unmerited and unparalleled kindness and love.

Upon this consideration the apostle founds his exhortation in the text, to which our attention is to be directed in the

*Last place: Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love.* When we speak of a child following the steps of his parent, we mean that he imitates the example which had been set before him. This is the idea here introduced. If we are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us our trespasses, and hath adopted us into His family, and is to us the God of love and mercy. If this unspeakable blessedness be our portion, it becomes us to act towards our fellow-creatures as God has acted to us, to *be followers* or imitators of Him, as His *dear* or beloved *children* ought to be. We are to *be kind and tender-hearted* towards each other, and ready to forgive those who may have offended us, and to *walk in love* towards all mankind; not in that spurious love which falsely bears the name, and displays itself in *fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the*



*mind*; but in that which consists in universal goodwill and benevolence, a readiness to do good both to the souls and bodies of all around us as we may have opportunity. That is the greatest love which has respect to the souls of our fellow-creatures, and evinces a desire for their eternal welfare and salvation. This is a feeling which should not be confined to the ministers of the gospel of Christ, but should be manifested by all who *have tasted that the Lord is gracious*; they should be anxious that all with whom they are connected in life, may be made partakers of the same blessedness which has been vouchsafed to their own souls; that those who are asleep in sin may be awakened, that those who are dead to God may be quickened by His almighty power and grace. They should be ready to address all such in the language of the word of God, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*. He will enlighten you by His grace. He will quicken you by His Spirit. Go to Christ, and He will bless you. May the exhortations of the holy scriptures sink deep into our minds, that we may comply with them, and thus manifest ourselves *to be the children of our Father which is in heaven*; and that living to His glory and showing forth His praise, we may be blessed by Him in this life and in that which is to come.

## SERMON XXII.

FOR

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

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CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

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Galatians iv. 31.

SO THEN, BRETHREN, WE ARE NOT CHILDREN  
OF THE BONDWOMAN, BUT OF THE FREE.

THE Epistle to the Galatians was written by the apostle Paul, for the purpose of warning those who had embraced the doctrines of Christianity by his instrumentality, to beware of false teachers, who had gone among them while he went to other regions, and had endeavoured to undermine his character, and to persuade them that it was necessary for believers in Christ to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. It appears that the faith of many persons had been subverted by means of these false teachers; and even some of those who had previously expressed the strongest attachment to the apostle and to the

doctrines which he taught. So great had been the regard which they professed to feel for him, that he says, *I bear you record that if it had been possible ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*<sup>9</sup> In return the apostle shows them the interest which he took in their spiritual welfare. He addresses them, *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.* But he intimates that the alteration which had taken place in their conduct, had somewhat weakened this bond of tender and warm affection. *I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*<sup>9</sup> He was anxious to visit them again, that he might ascertain the truth of the reports which he had heard respecting them, and might reprove or admonish them accordingly.

But in the mean time he shows them, in the Epistle for this day, the difference between the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, by referring to a circumstance in the history of the patriarch Abraham, which was recorded in the first book of Moses. This he calls *an allegory*, or a representation which had a typical meaning, from which it was to be inferred that under the patriarchal dispensation the blessings of the Christian covenant were historically represented; and that an intimation had been given that the

<sup>9</sup> Galatians iv. 15, 19, 20.

Mosaical or Levitical dispensation, which was about to be introduced, was one of bondage, which would afterwards be set aside, when the promise made to Abraham should be accomplished by the coming of the Deliverer, *in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.*<sup>10</sup>

This being the case, the apostle calls upon them, *Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?* You profess to be devotedly attached to the law of Moses, listen then to what he says. You may learn from him, that his dispensation was to be superseded by a better covenant. *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, but he of the freewoman was by promise.* This is a matter of historical record, brought forward for the purpose of affording an illustration of the subject. Not that such conduct would be justifiable now, under the Christian dispensation, whether it was then correct or not. The apostle, having related this fact, calls it *an allegory*, into the explanation of which he then enters, and makes an application of it in the text, for the purpose of enforcing the exhortation with which the next chapter commences, but which ought to have been the conclusion of this, as it is the inference drawn from the allegory.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis xxii. 18. Galatians iii. 8.

The text naturally divides itself into two parts, and may serve as the foundation of some remarks on the two characters of which it speaks. The division here made comprises all professors of Christianity. One or other of these characters belongs to each of us. Let it be our prayer then that the Spirit of God may be our Teacher, that we may ascertain our own real character in the sight of God, and may receive the admonition or the consolation which the description is calculated to give.

The first of the characters here described is, that of *the children of the bondwoman*. The apostle observes on the fact that he had related, *Which things are an allegory*; that is, they might properly be applied to the illustration of another subject: *For these are the two covenants, or dispensations, namely, the Mosaic and the Christian; the one from mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. At the time when the apostle wrote, though it was after the coming of Christ, the Jewish nation was in bondage, under a grievous yoke of burdensome and expensive ceremonies. St. Peter calls it a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.*<sup>11</sup> It imposed upon them duties which

<sup>11</sup> Acts xv. 10.

they were unable adequately to perform; and it exposed them to tremendous penalties for disobedience. The apostle had told them before, *As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them; and he adds afterwards, I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*<sup>12</sup> But being unable to fulfil it perfectly through the weakness of the flesh, or their fallen nature, they were under its curse for their disobedience.

The awful sanctions, under which the law of Moses was promulgated, were exhibited in the thunders and lightnings, and black clouds and smoke, which went up as the smoke of a furnace; and the quaking and trembling of the mount when the Lord Jehovah descended upon it.<sup>13</sup> The apostle refers to these accompaniments of the giving of the law in his epistle to the Hebrews. *Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burnt with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more, for they could not endure that which was commanded, If so much as a beast touch the mountain it shall be stoned, or thrust*

<sup>12</sup> Galatians iii. 10; v. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Exodus xix. 16—18.



*through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.*<sup>14</sup> The terrific accompaniments of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai were a picture of the nature of the dispensation then promulgated. Obedience was enforced by terrors and threatenings, that transgressors might be restrained from proceeding in a career of iniquity; its fearful consequences being brought before their eyes in a manner which might appal the stoutest heart. They were therefore under *bondage to fear*, or in continual dread of bringing upon themselves the penalties denounced against the disobedient.

This state of mind, which was naturally induced by the Mosaic dispensation, the apostle applies to those professors of Christianity, who, in consequence of having obscure and confused ideas of the gospel of Christ, desired to be under the law. They are *children of the bondwoman*, held under a grievous yoke of bondage, through an idea which they entertain, that their imperfect works of obedience to the law of God, according to the language of our thirteenth Article, "make them meet to receive grace, or deserve grace of congruity," because of their similarity in appearance to the works which God hath commanded to be done. The religion of the man who is not enlightened by the Spirit of

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews xii. 18—21.

God, is usually of this description; and hence it is that religion wears such a gloomy aspect as it is frequently observed to do in persons who pass in the world for being very religious. They *have received the spirit of bondage to fear,*<sup>15</sup> and they are uncomfortable under its yoke; their religion is a constant burden to them, because they think that it consists in the observance of a certain round of duties, or outward forms, by which they are to make their peace with God, but which, in reality, can give no peace to their consciences. They work hard to obtain their end, and subject themselves to numerous privations, and yet are in constant dread of coming short of the object which they propose to themselves by their labour. Such a system of discomfort is the religion which is naturally adopted by those who are unacquainted with the simplicity of the gospel of Christ, and are uninfluenced by it. Their system is bad, and will lead to grievous disappointment. For *what saith the scripture, Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. As the children of the bondwoman will be rejected from the heavenly inheritance,* it is needful for us to see to it that our profession of religion be not of this kind.

Let us then consider the apostle's description

<sup>15</sup> Romans viii. 15.

of the other character mentioned in the text, *the children of the freewoman*. As he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, so the religion which has been described, is that of fallen nature. But he of the freewoman was by promise; and the apostle observes, *Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise*, or such by Divine interposition and almighty power, that is, the children of God; *which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*<sup>16</sup> This is the primary characteristic of the true Christian. His spiritual life is not derived from any human source, but is communicated from above. The children of God are therefore called *the heirs of promise*;<sup>17</sup> and *if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*<sup>18</sup>

In opposition to the children of the bondwoman, the children of the ancient Jerusalem, which was then in a state of spiritual bondage, seeking justification before God by a law which condemned them; the apostle says, *But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.* This prophecy is taken from the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, and relates to the increase of the church of Christ, and

<sup>16</sup> John i. 13.    <sup>17</sup> Hebrews vi. 17.    <sup>18</sup> Romans viii. 17.

the success which should attend the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles after His death and resurrection. The apostle therefore applies it to the Christian church. *Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.*

But he thinks it needful to warn them that they must expect the opposition of the children of this world, in consequence of being the true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; which was also intimated in the history which he had quoted. Ishmael mocked Isaac,<sup>19</sup> and would have destroyed him, if it had been in his power. So the children of this world may be expected to act in all ages towards the children of God. *As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.* As it was in former times, so it will continue to be as long as the world lasts, and these two descriptions of persons are in it.

But hereafter a wide separation will take place. *Nevertheless, what saith the scripture, Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman; that is, he shall not inherit the blessing promised to the children of God.* Though he may have partaken of the outward privileges of the visible church of Christ on earth, he shall not be admitted into the church triumphant in heaven,

<sup>19</sup> Genesis xxi. 9.

but shall be cast into outer darkness, into misery and woe inconceivable. This is a subject which calls upon us for serious self-examination, that we may ascertain for ourselves what will be our future condition. May our privileges be blessings to us, and not rise up against us to our condemnation.

The apostle concludes, in the words of the text, in an exulting manner respecting believers in the Lord Jesus Christ: *So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.* The spiritual privileges to which believers in Christ are admitted, as *the children of the free-woman, or of Jerusalem which is above*, are described in the same chapter to the Hebrews as that before quoted respecting the terrors of Mount Sinai. In opposition to the state of bondage which those terrors occasioned, the apostle says to believers in Christ, *Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first born which are written in heaven; and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*<sup>20</sup> These things do not relate merely to the

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews xii. 22—24.

blessedness which shall hereafter be enjoyed by believers in Christ, but to that of which they are put in possession by faith in Him here on earth. They indeed *look for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God*;<sup>21</sup> but they also actually become citizens of it here below. The apostle says, *Our conversation, which some think might be rendered our citizenship,<sup>22</sup> is in heaven.* They are the subjects of the living God. He is their King; and they desire to live and walk *as strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, who are looking for a better city, even a heavenly one, which *God hath prepared for them.* The living God is the special object of their regard; they therefore live *as seeing Him who is invisible.*<sup>21</sup> They have for their fellow-servants of the same living God, *an innumerable company of angels*; and *the general assembly of the church of the first born*, the congregation of the redeemed. That God, who is *the Judge of all*, is their God; and even in this awful character they can look up to Him with filial reverence, and with godly fear, knowing that for the sake of their blessed Redeemer, in whom they put their trust, they shall be acquitted from all the charges which the accuser of the brethren can bring against them; and therefore the terrors of *the Judge of all* do not make them afraid, for they are assured that *it is*

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews xi. 10, 13, 16, 27.      <sup>22</sup> Philippians iii. 20.



*God that justifieth*<sup>23</sup> them. They have also fellowship with *the spirits of just men made perfect*, who are waiting for the general resurrection, when their *incorruptible* bodies shall *put on incorruption*, and that which was *mortal* shall *put on immortality*;<sup>24</sup> for these are not dead, but living.<sup>25</sup> They are come to *Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant*, their Mediator, through whose intercession their persons and services are continually rendered acceptable to God; and through whom they enjoy pardon and peace with God, through *the blood of sprinkling* which is applied to their consciences by faith. For the blood of Christ does not call down vengeance as Abel's did, but speaks peace to the souls of His believing people, for it cleanses them from all sin. How different is all this from the dispensation of Mount Sinai, whose characteristic is terror and alarm. The dispensation of Mount Sion is on the contrary joy and peace. For, as the apostle observes, *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*<sup>26</sup>

Are we then *the children of promise*? Are our hopes directed to the promises of God in Christ Jesus? If our religion does not make us happy and holy, we must be labouring under some grievous mistake. If we receive the religion of Christ, as it is set before us in the word of God,

<sup>23</sup> Rom. viii. 33. <sup>24</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 53. <sup>25</sup> Matt. xxii. 32. <sup>26</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 8.

if we receive it thus in simplicity and godly sincerity, it cannot but make us happy ; because it is a religion which announces pardon and peace to the guilty sinner, who is trembling under the fear of the wrath to come.

If then you have trembled under Mount Sinai at the terrors of the law, come to Mount Calvary and behold the ransom paid for the redemption of lost sinners. Behold peace made through the blood of the cross of Christ between guilty man and his offended Creator. Behold the blood of the Lamb of God crying, not for vengeance, but for pardon ; pleading for sinners, *Father, forgive them.*<sup>27</sup> Behold the gracious declaration made to all who truly turn to Him, and put their trust in His salvation, *If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins.*<sup>28</sup> Behold *the blood of sprinkling ready to be applied to the guilty conscience, to purge it from dead works to serve the living God.*<sup>29</sup> Faith in the atonement of Christ assures the soul of forgiveness ; and the discovery of this will lead the penitent to say, *O Lord, I will praise Thee ; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou hast comforted me.*<sup>30</sup> Behold also *the Mediator of the new covenant, who ever liveth to make intercession for them that come unto God by Him ;*<sup>29</sup> and

<sup>27</sup> Luke xxiii. 34. <sup>28</sup> 1 John ii. 1, 2. <sup>29</sup> Heb. ix. 14 ; vii. 25. <sup>30</sup> Is. xii. 1.

then you will not fear to draw nigh to God, *having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and having a High Priest over the house of God, by Him to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of your lips, giving thanks to His name.*<sup>31</sup>

Did we realize these things, how happy should we be at all times, rejoicing in the Lord God of our salvation. We should be ready to say, with the Psalmist, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear.* To please God would be our desire above all things. We should, in simplicity, commit all our cares and concerns into the hands of our heavenly Father, being persuaded of His care for us. We should endeavour to sustain, on all occasions, a character suitable to our profession of being *fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.*<sup>32</sup> We should seek grace to enable us, according to the exhortation with which the apostle follows up the statement contained in the text, to *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* As those who have been *delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God,*<sup>33</sup> or *delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son,*<sup>34</sup> we shall adhere to our privileges, and seek to enjoy

<sup>31</sup>Heb. x. 20, 21; xiii. 15. <sup>32</sup>Eph. ii. 19. <sup>33</sup>Rom. viii. 21. <sup>34</sup>Col. i. 13.

the blessedness which is connected with them. Instead of seeking justification by the law, since *by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, we shall, through the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*<sup>35</sup> *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*<sup>36</sup> *We shall walk in the Spirit, and not fulfil the lust of the flesh. We shall be led by the Spirit as those who are not under the law; and we shall bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance. We shall live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit, and sowing to the Spirit, we shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*<sup>35</sup> This is the blessedness which awaits *the children of promise*. All the promises of God in Christ Jesus shall be made good to them, to His glory and to their eternal salvation.

Are these then the objects of our earnest desire? Since God has *given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the Divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; are we earnestly seeking for the fulfilment of these promises to us, thus giving diligence to make our calling and election sure, that so an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting*

<sup>35</sup> Gal. ii. 16; v. 5, 16, 18, 22, 25; vi. 8.   <sup>36</sup> Rom. viii. 14.

*kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?*<sup>37</sup> If we are *the children of the freewoman*, this will be our character. We shall seek grace from God continually to enable us to live in obedience to His holy will and commandments, as those who are *made free from sin*, both in its guilt and its dominion, *and become servants to God*; and thus we shall have our *fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life*; because *the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*,<sup>38</sup> to them that believe in His name. That we may live as becometh the children of God here on earth, so as to look forward with a good hope of being admitted hereafter into His eternal glory, may He of His mercy grant for Christ's sake.

<sup>37</sup> 2 Peter iv. 10, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Romans vi. 22, 23.

## SERMON XXIII.

FOR

### THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

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CHRIST OUR HIGH PRIEST.

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Hebrews ix. 11.

CHRIST BEING COME A HIGH PRIEST OF  
GOOD THINGS TO COME.

THE character of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the *High Priest over the house of God*, and as such the *Mediator between God and man*, is the principal subject of the Epistle for this day. In the former part of the chapter, the apostle had been speaking of the ordinances of the Levitical service; and particularly of the great day of atonement, when once in every year the high priest of the Jews went into the most holy place, called the holy of holies. He intimates that these services were first commanded to be performed in a tabernacle, to denote that the institution was designed to be merely a temporary one. He



declares that the services performed in the tabernacle were *a figure for the time then present, or a shadow of good things to come*;<sup>39</sup> that they were imposed *until the time of reformation*, until the promised Seed of the woman should appear *to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*;<sup>39</sup> or until the *great Prophet should come into the world*, as the Jewish lawgiver had foretold,<sup>40</sup> who should appear *to fulfil all righteousness*;<sup>41</sup> of whose work of obedience and suffering the ordinances of the ceremonial law were typical, or a representation of what He should perform in His own person.

Let us consider what is related in the Epistle for this day, respecting the high priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ;

*First*, As to the place in which He officiates.

*Secondly*, As to the nature of His offering. And

*Thirdly*, As to the blessings which are secured by it to His church and people.

In considering each of these subjects, we may observe the manner in which the Christian dispensation is contrasted with the Levitical, from which the vast superiority of the former over the latter will be apparent.

May the Spirit of God be pleased to apply to our hearts the instructions of His holy word, that we may be enabled to rejoice in the high privi-

<sup>39</sup> Heb. x. 1; ix. 26.    <sup>40</sup> Deut. xviii. 15.    <sup>41</sup> Matt. iii. 15.

leges with which we are favoured; and may use them to His glory, and to our own happiness and salvation.

We are to consider the high priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ,

*First*, In reference to the place in which He officiates. The apostle calls it *a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building*. The tabernacle in the wilderness was a small place, into which only a few persons could enter at one time. The priests were therefore but a small number, consisting of only one family, Aaron and his sons. But the place in which Christ officiates is *a greater tabernacle*, one of vast extent, in which all His people shall be assembled with their great High Priest, being made themselves also priests unto God, *a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*.<sup>42</sup> But *greater* may denote merely the superiority of the antitype to the type. And in this respect it is said, *Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*.<sup>43</sup> This is indeed *a greater and more perfect* place, where nothing but infinite perfection exists. It is not a place formed with human hands, in the workmanship

<sup>42</sup> 1 Peter ii. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Hebrews ix. 24.

of which the imperfection of the artificer is apparent; but a place of which the *Builder and Maker is God*,<sup>44</sup> where He takes up His abode, where the beatific vision of His glory is displayed, and where the riches of His grace and glory are manifested to the blessed company who are admitted to *see Him as He is*.

In this *greater and more perfect tabernacle*, where *He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; a tabernacle that shall not be taken down*,<sup>45</sup> Christ officiates as a High Priest, in heaven, on behalf of His church and people on earth, as *a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man*; ever living to make *intercession for them that come unto God by Him*. His believing people are therefore exhorted, *By Him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*.<sup>44</sup> Hence they are assured that every blessing which they need shall be vouchsafed to them; and it is their privilege to look forward beyond this present life, and to rejoice in the hope of being admitted into the abode of the blessed hereafter; because it is said that *thither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec*.<sup>44</sup> He is en-

<sup>44</sup> Heb. xi. 10; viii. 2; xiii. 15; vi. 20. <sup>45</sup> Isa. xl. 22; xxxiii. 20.

tered into heaven as the Forerunner of His people, and they shall assuredly follow Him thither; since He has promised them, *Where I am, there ye shall be also, in the mansions of my Father's house.*<sup>46</sup> From thence they shall never go out, but *shall be ever with the Lord.* Let us then bring our offerings of prayer and praise with confidence to the throne of grace, relying on the advocacy of our *great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God,*<sup>47</sup> and not doubt of our continual acceptance through His merits and mediation. Let us thus *walk humbly with our God* here on earth; *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer;* and be assured that all the promises of His grace shall be made good to us in His eternal kingdom and glory, when we have done with all things here below. We are to consider,

*Secondly,* The nature of the offering which is made by our great High Priest. On this subject the apostle enlarges, as it is a most important one. *Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* Under the Old Testament dispensation, the offerings made in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation, consisted of the blood of animals, which were slain for the purpose of show-

<sup>46</sup> John xiv. 2, 3.    <sup>47</sup> Heb. iv. 14.    <sup>48</sup> Rom. xii. 12.

ing the desert of the sinner. The transgressor of the law of Moses was directed to bring his offering, and to confess over it his sins, laying his hand upon the head of the victim; and then the animal was put to death as his substitute, and the blood which was shed was sprinkled upon the altar to make atonement for him. When this had been done, the man was considered to be absolved from the penalty due to his transgression; and was permitted to join in the worship of God with the congregation, from which his sin would otherwise have excluded him. The apostle remarks respecting these offerings, that *the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh.* A compliance with the appointed ordinance of sacrifice admitted the offerer to the outward privileges from which he would have been cut off; he was esteemed clean as to the purposes for which this was requisite; the unclean not being permitted to appear among the congregation of the people of God. The ordinance respecting the heifer is recorded in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Numbers. It was directed to be put to death as a sacrifice, and then it was to be burnt to ashes; and these ashes were to be kept by themselves in a clean place, and to be made use of as a purification for sin. And it was declared that *the man that shall be unclean, and shall*



*not purify himself with these ashes, in the manner that was appointed, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord; the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.*<sup>49</sup>

With these legal purifications, which referred only to the flesh, or the outward man, the apostle contrasts the superior benefit derived from the blood-shedding and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?* If the offerings appointed under the old dispensation answered the purpose designed by them; if they restored those who had contracted any pollution, which separated them from the ordinances of Divine worship, to communion with the visible church; how much more shall the blood of Christ answer the purpose for which it was shed, namely, that of cleansing the consciences of those to whom its virtue is applied by faith, from sin and guilt; and of rendering them acceptable worshippers of the living and true God, who demands the service of the heart as well as that of the body.

The animals offered in sacrifice under the law of Moses were to be without blemish; so the

<sup>49</sup> Numbers xix. 20.



offering of Christ was *without spot*. He was *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*.<sup>50</sup> This was His character in all respects; from His conception, of which the angel said to His virgin mother, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called The Son of God*.<sup>51</sup> And in the whole course of His life, *God gave not the Spirit by measure unto Him*;<sup>52</sup> but He was *full of the Holy Ghost*;<sup>51</sup> so that He was a most holy Person. The apostle has elsewhere asserted that *He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*.<sup>53</sup> His Divine nature imparted perfection to all that He did upon earth. He was consequently a most holy Priest, and a spotless Victim; so that every act which He performed was meritorious, and His sacrifice was *a propitiation for the sins of the whole world*. All therefore to whom the blessings of the gospel of Christ are made known, are invited to come and take the benefit of them; and none who humbly and earnestly seek them, shall find their application to be in vain. His sacrifice was "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." And the virtue of it was commanded to be *preached to every*

<sup>50</sup> Heb. vii. 26. <sup>51</sup> Luke i. 35; iv. 1. <sup>52</sup> John iii. 34. <sup>53</sup> Rom. i. 4.

*creature under heaven,*<sup>54</sup> that all men every where might *repent and believe the gospel,*<sup>55</sup> and partake of its blessings in time and in eternity. Let us place our confidence in the offering of our great High Priest, which was once offered to put away sin; that being reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we may enjoy pardon and peace in our consciences here on earth, and may rejoice in hope of the glory of God hereafter. We are to consider,

*Thirdly,* The blessings bestowed, in consequence of the offering of Christ, upon His church and people. On this subject it is said, that *He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* On the great day of atonement, once a year, the Jewish high priest went into the most holy place, and sprinkled the blood of the goat, which had been sacrificed, within the veil, before the mercy-seat.<sup>56</sup> So Christ our great High Priest is gone into heaven, into the most *holy place, not made with hands,* to present the memorial of His own blood-shedding and death in the presence of the Most Holy One on behalf of His believing people; for whom He has obtained eternal redemption; in consequence of which their sins and their iniquities shall be remembered no more, and they shall partake of His everlasting salvation; shall be delivered from

<sup>54</sup> Col. i. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Mark i. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Levit. xvi. 15.

*the wrath to come,*<sup>57</sup> and put in possession of the glory to be revealed in His eternal kingdom. Such will be the final consummation of their blessedness. This being the design of the offering of Christ, of the shedding of His precious blood, of His acting as the *High Priest over the house of God*; this blessedness shall most assuredly be bestowed upon all who put their trust in Him; they shall partake of that *eternal redemption* which He has *obtained* for them. In the prospect therefore of parting with all things here below, they may well look up with gratitude to their High Priest, and believe that in a little time they shall be admitted to see His face without a veil, and to praise Him for His redeeming grace and dying love throughout the countless ages of eternity. Let us look forward to this blessedness which our great High Priest has purchased for His church and people with His own blood; let us anticipate the period when all His exceeding great and precious promises shall be fulfilled, that we may glory in His holy name, and our hearts may rejoice in seeking the Lord; and that having *the joy of the Lord* for our *strength*,<sup>59</sup> we may press forward in the narrow way to His heavenly kingdom.

But with regard to the benefits of which believers in Christ are partakers, through faith in His blood here upon earth, it is said, *The blood*

<sup>57</sup> 1 Thess. i. 10.      <sup>58</sup> Heb. x. 21.      <sup>59</sup> Neh. viii. 10.

*of Christ shall purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God.* The apostle had before stated respecting the legal sacrifices, or those which were offered up under the law of Moses, that they *could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience*; and he afterwards gives his reason for this assertion, asking, *For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.*<sup>60</sup> The daily repetition of the same sacrifices showed that a merely temporary benefit was derived from them, and that they could not remove a sense of guilt from the conscience.

But in opposition to these sacrifices, the blood of Christ, when it is applied by faith, purges or cleanses the conscience from dead works, or the works of sin, so that the believer in Him becomes dead to sin, and lives no longer therein as formerly; as the apostle says to the Romans, *Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*<sup>61</sup> Pardoning mercy for sins past, being vouchsafed through the bloodshedding and death of the Lamb of God, is brought home to the conscience, so that the pardoned sinner becomes a servant of the living God, to *worship Him in spirit and in truth.*<sup>62</sup> As

<sup>60</sup> Heb. x. 1, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Rom. vi. 6.

<sup>62</sup> John iv. 24.

long as the conscience labours under a sense of guilt, there is no possibility of enjoying communion with God. But when this is removed, we look up to the God of heaven with gratitude and affection, as the Father of mercies and the God of all grace. Then the penitent sinner is enabled to draw near to Him as his reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, and finds rest to his soul in casting all his care and concerns upon the tender compassion and mercy of the Lord his God.

The apostle states, however, the nature of the blessings which are conferred through the blood of Christ more fully in the last verse of the Epistle for this day. *And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.* As the Mediator of the new testament or covenant, our Lord Jesus Christ intercedes in behalf of His church and people. He pleads His blood-shedding for their pardon. He pleads what He has done and suffered as the ground of their acceptance, that they may obtain *every good and perfect gift*<sup>63</sup> of which they stand in need at His hands. He pleads His death *for the redemption of the transgressions that*

<sup>63</sup> James i. 17.

were under the first testament, or that He was born under the law, to redeem them that were under the law;<sup>64</sup> that He suffered the penalty which the law demanded, when *the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all*;<sup>65</sup> that the curse denounced by the old covenant was inflicted upon Him; and therefore those who believe in Him must be freed from it. As He was made answerable for the penalty due to sin, it shall not again be exacted of them, but their trespasses shall all be forgiven; their sins shall be cast into the depths of the sea, no more to rise up in judgment against them. He pleads the promise of pardon which has been made to them in Him; a promise which the faithfulness of God is bound to make good. He pleads the promise of the heavenly inheritance, which has also been given to them; and therefore they shall in due time enter upon it. He pleads that, as the call of the gospel has been sent to them, those who through grace obey that call cannot be denied the blessings promised, either in this life, or in that which is to come. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ appears as the Mediator and Advocate of His church and people before the throne of God; and as He is also the Surety of the covenant,<sup>66</sup> they may be satisfied that its blessings shall be bestowed upon them; that they shall not be ashamed of their hope.

<sup>64</sup> Gal. iv. 4, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Isaiah liii. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Heb. vii. 22.



He will see to it that they are not disappointed who put their trust in Him.

How delightful is it to contemplate our Lord Jesus Christ in the character in which He is set before us in the text, as the *High Priest of good things to come*, who is gone into heaven in human nature to present the memorial of His bloodshedding and death before the throne of God, and there to plead for the fulfilment of the promises made by His heavenly Father to them that believe in His name. How delightful to contemplate Him as *the Mediator of the new testament*, who intercedes on behalf of all *them that come unto God by Him*, that those spiritual and eternal blessings which they need may be vouchsafed to them. His having gone into heaven, the most holy place, affords an assurance to them that are called by His grace to the knowledge and love of Him, that they shall obtain the blessing of *eternal redemption* which He has purchased for them, that they shall receive the *eternal inheritance*, which is promised to them by His grace.

Let us then look up to our High Priest and Mediator as our Advocate on high, and pray that through Him these blessings may be bestowed upon us; and that we may be *sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, unto the praise of His glory.*<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ephesians i. 13, 14.

Let us seek to have our consciences cleansed from all sin day by day, by means of a continually renewed application to the blood of sprinkling. Let us consider it as the employment of our lives, and our highest privilege, to serve the living God, to live in obedience to His word and will, to serve and please Him in newness of life. Let the death of Christ be our only hope and confidence for pardoning mercy. When sin is brought home to our consciences, and the conviction is fastened upon our minds that we are verily guilty before God, let us by faith *behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,*<sup>68</sup> that we may enjoy a sense of pardon and peace with God; that guilt may be removed, and that being reconciled to God through the death of His Son, we may have communion and fellowship with Him, under the influence of the Holy Spirit; and may go on our way rejoicing, so as to run with patience the race that is set before us; and fighting the good fight of faith, may lay hold on eternal life, whereunto also we are called. In a little time the race will be run, the conflict will be over; the prize of the high calling of God in Christ will be obtained by those who have so run as the word of God directs us to do. **May we be numbered among them!**

*Finally,* Let none who hear the call of the gospel

<sup>68</sup> John i. 29.

turn a deaf ear to it; but may you so hear it that your souls may live. Let it be the great concern of every one of us, that we may be *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*,<sup>69</sup> that we may be *heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*,<sup>70</sup> that the promise of the eternal inheritance may be ours also. It will do us no good to hear of these things, unless we earnestly seek for ourselves to partake of the blessing. It will be of no use to hear of the high priesthood of Christ, unless through Him we draw nigh to God; to hear of His being the Mediator of the new testament, unless we make use of His mediation; to hear that the consciences of men are cleansed by faith in His blood, unless we receive the benefit of it for ourselves; to hear that He died for our redemption, unless we seek for the pardon of our sins; to hear of the promise of the eternal inheritance, unless we hope to possess it, through union with Him by a living faith. May we then not hear in vain that the Lord our God waiteth to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon the penitent sinner who is humbled at His footstool, and desirous of enjoying reconciliation with Him. May we look to Christ our great High Priest for the blessings which He came into the world to bestow upon the sinful children of men, that we may partake of His great salvation in time and in eternity.

<sup>69</sup> Galatians iii. 26.

<sup>70</sup> Romans viii. 17.

# SERMON XXIV.

FOR THE

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER.

---

THE MIND OF CHRIST.

---

Philippians ii. 5.

LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU WHICH WAS ALSO  
IN CHRIST JESUS.

IN the Collect for this day, the "great humility," or the wonderful humiliation of the Son of God, is spoken of as a pattern which it becomes us as Christians to contemplate and to follow. This is the subject to which our meditation is directed in a special manner at this season, when we call to mind the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, or of *Christ our passover* being *sacrificed for us*.

In the text the apostle Paul exhorts those who had been made acquainted with the *consolation* that is *in Christ*, with the *comfort of His love*, and the *fellowship of the Spirit of His grace*,

to contemplate the *mind which was in Christ Jesus*, in order that they might be conformed or assimilated to it; and in the remainder of the Epistle for this day he explains the subject, shows the depth of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus, how very low He abased Himself from a state of the highest glory; but that the path of humiliation which He pursued, led Him subsequently to a state of exaltation, in which He receives worship and adoration from those in behalf of whom He so greatly abased Himself. From the words before us, let us,

*First*, Inquire, What was the mind which was in Christ Jesus?

*Secondly*, Observe the state of exaltation to which it led Him; and,

*Thirdly*, Consider the import of the exhortation.

May the Spirit of God apply His word to our hearts, that we may by means of it be edified and comforted. We are to inquire,

*First*, What was the mind which was in Christ Jesus, as it is laid open to us in the verses which follow the text? For the purpose of leading us to form right ideas on the subject, the apostle thought it needful to describe the person of Christ, or to make mention of His high dignity. *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. The form of God* denotes that He had the appearance of being God. Some

persons have supposed that this expression refers not to His state in heaven, where His eternal power and Godhead are undisputed, but to the Divine appearances to the patriarchs and prophets under the old testament dispensation, which are here intimated to have been appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was then called, from the office which He sustained, *the Angel of the Lord*, and *the Messenger of the covenant*;<sup>71</sup> and when He thus appeared, He acted as God, He did that which could only be performed by Divine power. In these appearances He was manifested to be *the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person*.<sup>72</sup> It was no robbery, when in these cases He spoke of Himself as God; as He did when He appeared to Moses in the bush, and to the patriarchs on various occasions.

We find Him speaking in the days of His flesh, when He was about to leave this world, of *the glory which He had with the Father before the world was*.<sup>73</sup> Then His glory was displayed in the heavenly world; where the celestial hosts worship Him as their Creator and their King, "in glory equal and majesty co-eternal" with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Had He therefore seen fit, when upon earth, to manifest His Divine glory to the world, He might have done so

<sup>71</sup> Gen. xxii. 11. Mal. iii. 1. <sup>72</sup> Heb. i. 3. <sup>73</sup> John xvii. 5.



without any robbery. He would have displayed only His true and real character; since He *is* undoubtedly, as His apostle declared, *Over all, God blessed for ever.*<sup>74</sup> To show however that glory did properly belong to Him, He gave to some of His disciples a glimpse of it *in the holy mount, when He was transfigured before them, and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.*<sup>75</sup> This made the evangelist St. John declare, *We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father;*<sup>76</sup> and the apostle Peter asserts, that *He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*<sup>77</sup> But He charged His disciples not to make known what they had seen while He was in this world, because it was expedient that His glory should be veiled from those among whom He had condescended to take up His abode for a season, when He came to dwell with sinful men on earth.

The apostle having given this intimation of the Divine character and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, proceeds to speak of His humiliation: that *He made Himself of no reputation, or literally, emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.* This is the first point of our Redeemer's humi-

<sup>74</sup> Rom. ix. 5. <sup>75</sup> Matt. xvii. 2. <sup>76</sup> John i. 14. <sup>77</sup> 2 Peter i. 17.

liation. He divested Himself of all appearance of the Divine glory. *The Word who was in the beginning with God, and was God, was made flesh, and dwelt among us, as a Man among men.*<sup>78</sup> What a wonderful humiliation was this! that *God* should be *manifest in the flesh*,<sup>79</sup> that the Lord of glory should appear in our world, as *Immanuel, God with us*,<sup>80</sup> that He should pass through the regular gradations of infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood; so as to become intimately acquainted with the condition of each from His own experience, that it might be said of Him by His people, *We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*; from which the apostle infers, *In that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.*<sup>81</sup>

But He was not only a partaker of flesh and blood, He appeared further in a low condition of life, as a poor man. This was in order that the poorest and meanest might be encouraged to come to Him with confidence, and not be afraid of Him. And we find that they consequently thronged about Him, that *the common people heard Him gladly*; and came to make known to Him all their complaints and grief and sorrows. And He sent none of them empty away. He kindly

<sup>78</sup> John i. 1, 14. <sup>79</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16. <sup>80</sup> Matt. i. 23. <sup>81</sup> Heb. iv. 15; ii. 18.

listened to all their humble supplications, and granted them that relief which they needed. What condescension, what humility was this!

But the humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ was shown not merely by His assuming the nature of man, or appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh. This was only a step towards a still lower degree of abasement. *And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He was born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*<sup>82</sup> What an amazing humiliation was this! for the infinitely glorious King of heaven to appear like one of His own creatures, and to obey and suffer in our stead; to suffer all the ignominy and shame which those whom He came to redeem could heap upon Him, until at length He expired in agony and pain upon the cross. Here humiliation was brought to its lowest degree. A crucified slave was considered to be in the most abject condition to which a human being could be reduced. The punishment of crucifixion was thought to be too degrading to be inflicted on a Roman citizen. Those only were put to death in this manner, who were looked upon as the most despicable and worthless outcasts of society. Yet to this ignominious, shameful, and painful death, the Lord of glory submitted to be put, when He ap-

peared upon earth, *to redeem us from the curse of the law*, by being *made a curse for us*.<sup>82</sup> What an amazing abasement was this! He knew beforehand all that was to come upon Him; and yet He refused not to *endure the cross, despising the shame*<sup>83</sup> and ignominy to which it exposed Him, for us men and for our salvation.

How humble ought this consideration to make us, that it should have been needful for the Lord of glory to abase Himself to so low a state of degradation and shame, in order to redeem our ruined race. He *became obedient unto death*. His whole life was one course of continued and un-deviating obedience to the holy law of God; and it was brought to a close by *the death of the cross*. All this He voluntarily undertook to do and to suffer for His sinful creatures, that He might be *the propitiation for our sins*,<sup>84</sup> that we might be reconciled to God by His obedience unto death.

What humbleness of mind did the conduct of our Lord Jesus Christ evince! That He who filled the highest station in the universe, whom the hosts of heaven worship and adore, should humble Himself to be placed in the lowest state to which those whom He came to redeem could be reduced, so that while He went about doing good, He had not where to lay His head; and that He should humble Himself still further, after hav-

<sup>82</sup> Gal. iv. 4, 5; iii. 13.   <sup>83</sup> Heb. xii. 2.   <sup>84</sup> 1 John ii. 2.

ing filled the lowest station in this world, to endure the most extreme misery of which human nature was capable. What humility was this! The difference between the highest and the lowest in the scale of human society, does not admit of the least degree of comparison with that of the vast essential distinction between the Creator and the creature. The Psalmist expresses his feelings of awe and reverence on this subject. *When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?*<sup>85</sup> Were it possible for a king to reduce himself to the state of a private person, and place himself on a level with the poorest man in his dominions, for the benefit of his subjects, in order to obtain for them some valuable privileges, which they could not otherwise receive; and after having lived a life of privation and contempt among those whom he benefited, to be ignominiously put to death by them as a malefactor; this would be considered by the posterity of those who received the benefits thus conferred upon them, as an act of most surprising condescension on the part of their sovereign. But it would be as nothing in comparison with the depth of self-abasement which was manifested by our Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>85</sup> Psalm viii. 3, 4.

in His becoming a Man among men; in the Creator of all things divesting Himself of His glory, and appearing to be a mere creature; and enduring all that was requisite to magnify His holy law, and make it honourable by His obedience to its precepts, and by suffering its penalty, the curse and wrath of God due to sin. What love to mankind did this display! What pity and compassion to our ruined race! The apostle says, *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.*<sup>86</sup> What grace, what love was this! The love of Christ truly passeth knowledge; the greatness of it is inconceivable; it is beyond our comprehension. Oh! that our hearts were affected by it as they ought to be. We are called to contemplate it, in order that the same *mind may be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus*; that we may be humble, meek, and lowly in heart, as He was; that those evil passions, by which mankind are commonly carried away, may be mortified in and by us, that we may learn to do *nothing through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than ourselves; to look not every man on his own things only, or those which regard his own personal interest, or aggrandisement, but*

<sup>86</sup> 2 Corinthians viii. 9.



*every man also on the things of others, that we may bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*<sup>87</sup> We are to observe,

*Secondly, The state of exaltation to which the humiliation of Christ was preparatory. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to or in the glory of God the Father. The exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ in human nature appeared first in His resurrection. He was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.*<sup>88</sup> It appeared further by His ascension into heaven in the sight of His wondering disciples. *While they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*<sup>89</sup> Such are the accounts given by the Evangelists. And St. Peter afterwards tells us that *He is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.*<sup>90</sup> Thus He is highly exalted in human nature as the great King of heaven and

<sup>87</sup> Gal. vi. 2.    <sup>88</sup> Rom. i. 4.    <sup>89</sup> Luke xxiv. 51. Mark xvi. 19.

earth, the *King of kings, and Lord of lords*.<sup>91</sup> The nature of man was glorified in the Man Christ Jesus, in consequence of His sufferings and death. He was exalted in human nature as the *Lord of all*,<sup>92</sup> the Head of His body the church, having all power in heaven and on earth. He has taken the manhood into God, and having *entered into His glory* in heaven, He there displays His almighty power and His unspeakable majesty, all things in heaven and earth being subjected to His dominion. He is exalted also as the great High Priest over the house of God, the Mediator of the new covenant, the Protector of His church and people from the power of their spiritual enemies, the Preserver of all them that put their trust in Him from every evil.

His name *is above every name*; His name JESUS, which was given Him, because *He should save His people from their sins*.<sup>93</sup> The name of the Saviour of sinners is that which redounds to the glory of His grace. No name is so important to be known by us as the name of Jesus; *for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*.<sup>92</sup> The right knowledge of His name brings salvation. Those who are ignorant of this name will perish in their sins. Other names may be unknown, may be disregarded without any evil consequences ensuing.

<sup>90</sup> 1 Peter iii. 24. <sup>91</sup> Rev. xix. 16. <sup>92</sup> Acts x. 36; iv. 12. <sup>93</sup> Matt. i. 21.

This cannot: for *he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*<sup>94</sup> There is no other name or person of whom this can be truly said. Of Him it was foretold, *In His name shall the Gentiles trust.*<sup>95</sup> And when He appeared in our world, St. John says of Him, *As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.*<sup>94</sup> On which account he addressed believers in Christ, *I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*<sup>96</sup> Truly then the name of Jesus is above every name; since the knowledge of it conveys such blessedness, wherever it is communicated; and ignorance of it is attended with such fatal consequences.

It is required of those to whom this name is made known, that they should worship and obey Him that bears it. Every knee in heaven and earth, and under the earth, must bow before the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole rational creation will give honour and glory to their Creator and their King. *All the world shall worship Him, sing of Him, and praise His name. For to this end, Christ both died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee*

<sup>94</sup> John iii. 36; i. 12. <sup>95</sup> Isa. xlii. 1. Matt. xii. 21. <sup>96</sup> 1 John ii. 12.

*shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*<sup>97</sup>

To confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, is to submit to His authority, to obey His laws or commandments. To confess this to the glory of God the Father is to acknowledge the Divine power of Jesus Christ as that for which He is to be praised and magnified. But the statement is rather that He is Lord *in* the glory of God the Father. As it is said in our Communion Service, referring doubtless to this passage of holy writ, "Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father." He who appeared as a Man among men on earth, who laid aside His glory that He might be the Redeemer of perishing sinners, is the *Lord of all*, to whom Divine honour and glory is to be ascribed by all His creatures. This glory rightfully belongs to Him, and He requires that it should be acknowledged as His due. Let us then *give unto the Lord Jesus the glory due unto His name*; let us *worship the Lord with holy worship*;<sup>98</sup> let us submit ourselves to His authority; and put our trust in His name, that we may be blessed by Him in time and in eternity. We are to consider,

*Thirdly*, The apostle's exhortation in the text, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*. His great humility is the pattern which

<sup>97</sup> Romans xiv. 9, 11.

<sup>98</sup> Psalm xxix. 2.

those who are interested in the work of His redemption are to follow; to *be likeminded* with Him, *having the same love*, of which He has shown so amazing an example, *being of one accord, of one mind*. Let us look at the mind which was in Christ Jesus, and then look at our own. What kindness and love and humility were in Him, *who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame*. The joy of *bringing many sons to glory*,<sup>99</sup> of saving their precious souls, led Him to abase Himself so low. If we have been made acquainted with His great salvation, how ought we to be influenced by the consideration of the mind that was in Christ Jesus, to exhibit in our conduct the excellence of His holy religion, to show that it does teach us to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*.<sup>1</sup>

But in order that we may *have the mind of Christ*, we must be sensible of the greatness of our obligations to Him for having come into the world to be our Redeemer, and having humbled Himself to suffer, bleed, and die, as our ransom. Unless this be the case, in vain is it to expect that the humility and obedience of Christ should appear and be exemplified in our conduct. Is the death of Christ then, which we commemorate peculiarly at this season, our hope and

<sup>99</sup> Hebrews xii. 2; ii. 10.

<sup>1</sup> Titus ii. 12.

dependence for the pardon of our sins? Unless we are really concerned to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, we shall regard the great humiliation of the Son of God as a matter of little importance or interest to ourselves; and the example derived from it will have but little influence over us. It is for want of considering our great obligations to the Son of God, that the exhortations of His holy word do not affect us as they ought to do.

How many, alas, who call themselves Christians, think nothing about either the love of Christ or the example which He hath left us. If we profess to bear this honourable name, let us consider the spirit and conduct to which our profession of being Christians obliges us. At our baptism we were signed "with the sign of the cross, in token that we should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end." This confession is to be made, not only during one week in the year, not only in Passion week, but all the year round. Christ crucified is to be the object of our regard day by day, all the days of our lives. The love of Christ in giving Himself for our sins should excite our deepest gratitude, and our most cheerful obedience to His holy will and commandments. But the contrite in heart only, who have been convinced of the sins of their



hearts and lives by the Spirit of God, can be sensible of the greatness of the love of Christ in dying for us. If "we earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty," we shall be anxious to obtain pardoning mercy from the God of all grace; and seeing that it is bestowed through Christ upon all who, with true contrition of heart, confess their sins at **His** footstool, and by faith *behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world*; we shall thankfully "embrace the blessed hope of everlasting life which is given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ." And then love, humility, and obedience will appear in our conduct. Then we cannot but desire to *have the mind of Christ*, to be influenced by **His** Spirit, to love **Him** above all things, and to live in the exercise of love, and in peace with all around us. In whatever respect Christ hath left us an example that we should follow **His** steps, we shall then be willing to follow **Him**, through evil report and good report, being anxious only to please **Him**, and to be conformed to **His** blessed will and **His** glorious and lovely image; looking forward to the time when **His** glory shall be manifested to the assembled universe; when **He** who *was once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear the second time, without sin, unto the salvation* of **His** believing people.

# SERMON XXV.

FOR

## GOOD FRIDAY.

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THE ONE OFFERING FOR SIN.

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Hebrews x. 14.

FOR BY ONE OFFERING HE HATH PERFECTED  
FOR EVER THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED.

THE atonement which was effected by our Divine Redeemer is the subject to which our attention is directed in a peculiar manner on this day. The benefit conferred by means of this propitiation for sin, and the character of the persons who are interested in it, are set before us in the text. That the one offering of Christ was fully sufficient for the purpose designed by it, is particularly insisted on in the former part of the Epistle for this day. The inferiority of the sacrifices under the Mosaical dispensation to the offering of Christ, is the first thing mentioned. *The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never, with those sacrifices which they offered year by*

*year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect.*

The law of Moses afforded a shadow or a figurative representation of the blessings which, in the fulness of time, God was about to bestow upon mankind by the fulfilment of the promise made to our first parents, on the occasion of their grievous fall. It was designed to typify the gospel-dispensation, and the benefits which it would confer; and therefore could not answer the end which was to be accomplished by the dispensation which it typified. The Levitical sacrifices could not remove guilt from the conscience, in such a way as to satisfy the offerer that he was reconciled to God, unless he were able to look beyond the type to the antitype, or from the appointed victim offered at the door of the tabernacle, to Him who was to offer up Himself as the propitiation for our sins in the end of the world, or at the close of the dispensation.

If the Levitical sacrifices had cleansed the offerers from sin in the sight of God, the apostle asks, *Then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins.* Although the transgressors of the law were restored to the outward privileges of the church of God, when they had offered the appointed sacrifice, it appears that their consciences were burdened with a sense of guilt, from which their sacrifices did not relieve them. Sin still troubled their con-

sciences; so that it was needful for them to humble themselves before God, and to implore His pardoning mercy, through the promised Redeemer of mankind. The apostle proves his assertion further, by observing that *in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year*. Year after year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, the same confession of sins was to be made, the same ceremonies were to be performed, the same sacrifices to be offered: all which proved the insufficiency of the service to answer any other than a temporary purpose.

But the apostle shows the inadequacy of the sacrifices themselves to remove the sense of guilt from the conscience of the offerer. *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins*. He had mentioned in the preceding chapter the purpose which was answered by them; that they *sanctified to the purifying of the flesh*. But a better sacrifice than these was necessary to *purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God*. On this subject therefore he proceeds to speak. *Wherefore when He cometh into the world He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me; in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast no pleasure; then said I, Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me, to do Thy will, O God*. This quotation is taken from the fortieth Psalm. But there is a remarkable difference

in it. The words, *A body hast Thou prepared Me*, being in the Psalm, *Mine ear hast Thou opened*. The expression in the Psalm denoted, that the person who utters the words, was of his own accord, of his free will, the Lord's servant. It referred to the law which enjoined that if a Hebrew servant was unwilling to leave the house of his master in the year of release, his master was to *take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door*; after which he was to be his *servant for ever*.<sup>2</sup> This was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, when *He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*.<sup>3</sup>

The apostle remarks on the passage which he had produced from the book of Psalms, *Above, when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings, and offering for sin, Thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said He, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second*. Thus, from the Psalmist's own words, the apostle shows that the former dispensation was designed to be a transitory one; or, that by the coming of the Lord's servant, the will of God was to be accomplished and manifested in the fullest and plainest manner, and that in which God had no pleasure, the sacrifice of ani-

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy xv. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians ii. 7.

mal victims, was to be abolished. The will of God is that in which He takes pleasure, in the accomplishment of which He delights. It was His love to man which sent His only begotten Son into the world; and it was pleasing to Him to see the work of redemption completed by His beloved Son, *in whom He was well pleased*. The Father of heaven beheld with delight the sacrifice of His well beloved Son; it was to Him *a sweet smelling savour*, even while His wrath fell upon Him, the poison whereof drank up His spirits; and He forsook Him, because He was in the place of the guilty, a substitute for the transgressors. And as He beheld with delight the accomplishment of His will, in the atonement made for sin by our ever blessed Redeemer, He beholds with the same delight all those who put their trust in His propitiation for their pardon and salvation. And it is in consequence of the accomplishment of this will of God that believers in Christ are made the children of God, and set apart to His service as *a holy people unto the Lord their God,*<sup>4</sup> as vessels *unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*<sup>5</sup> *By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* There is no sanctification without pardon; until we receive the forgiveness of our

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy xiv. 2.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy ii. 21.



sins by faith in Christ Jesus, we cannot have a portion among them that are sanctified. But the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart of every pardoned sinner, and influences and actuates him to every good work.

The apostle thinks it needful to insist again and again in this Epistle on the sufficiency of the one offering of Christ to expiate sin; and contrasts with this one offering once made, the frequently repeated offerings of the Levitical dispensation, respecting which he observes, that *every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins*. The sacrifices under the law of Moses could *never take away sins*, a consciousness of guilt still rested upon the mind, notwithstanding the ceremonial uncleanness, which cut off the sinner from the congregation of the Lord, was removed, so that he could join again in the ordinances of the worship of God in His holy temple. But the sacrifice of Christ, trusted in by faith, removes guilt from the conscience, and reconciles the sinner to God, so that he regards the God of heaven as His reconciled Father, and comes into His presence as one of His children, to receive the promised blessings of His grace.

A proof is next given of the acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ. *But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting*

*till His enemies be made His footstool.* As He died for our sins, He rose again for our justification, and He is gone into heaven as our High Priest, who will present our prayers and praises before the throne, that they may be *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*;<sup>6</sup> and as our King, who has *all power in heaven and earth*,<sup>7</sup> and will order all things for the good of His church and people; and will subdue all His and their enemies; and hereafter will triumph over them all to their eternal confusion.

The apostle then shows in the text, that the offering of Christ having been accepted, of which His resurrection and ascension into heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God, afford full proof; those who are interested in it by faith, are made partakers of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, and are *perfected for ever*; they are viewed as without spot in the Divine presence, being *washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*,<sup>8</sup> so that it is their high privilege to walk with God as His beloved children, to live as in His sight, to have their conversation in heaven, and their affection set on things above. *For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* The offering of Christ having been accepted, no other sacrifice is needed for the

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter ii. 5.    <sup>7</sup> Matt. xxviii. 18.    <sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11.

satisfaction of Divine justice; it is therefore the privilege of believers in Christ to draw nigh to God at all times, who *hath made them accepted in His beloved Son.*

Unexceptionable testimony is brought forward to prove this, that there might be no doubt respecting it, *Whereof the Holy Ghost is a Witness to us.* The Holy Ghost is a Witness by means of what is recorded on the subject in the Old Testament: *for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*<sup>9</sup> For after that prediction in the Psalm, *He had said before,* or prophesied, in the book of Jeremiah, *This is the covenant that I will make with them, After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*<sup>10</sup> Here is another reference made in the inspired writings of the Old Testament to the Christian dispensation, in which the blessings of the new covenant are distinctly stated, that they consist in having the love of God in the heart; in the mind or understanding approving the things that are excellent; and in a conformity to the law of God being consequently manifested in the life and conduct. All this resulting from pardon of sin brought home to the conscience, through the

<sup>9</sup> 2 Peter i. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah xxxi. 33, 34

sacrifice of Christ, which alone is effectual for this purpose; this being God's appointed method for the expiation of the sins of mankind.

It is therefore declared, *Now where remission of these is, there is no more sacrifice for sin* requisite. When sin is pardoned, no further sacrifice is needed. This is a doctrine of vast importance, which demands our attentive consideration. For want of a right understanding of it, many humble and conscientious persons go on in a great degree of darkness and misery and want of consolation.

The apostle proceeds to show that the way is completely open for the believer in Christ, who trusts in His sacrifice for sin for his own forgiveness, to draw nigh to God; that every obstacle is removed which would prevent such persons from having access into the Divine presence; so that the penitent sinner or the humble believer may *come boldly*, with confidence of acceptance, and with liberty of speech, through the merits of his Saviour, *to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* He says, *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, His flesh.* Believers in Christ have access into the most holy place, into the most holy presence of the most holy Lord God Almighty, into heaven itself,

as it were ; where *their voice is heard, and their prayer comes up to His holy dwelling place, even unto heaven;*<sup>11</sup> while they plead *the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.*<sup>12</sup> This way of access to God is called *a new way*, in distinction from that of the ceremonial observances by which He was to be approached under the old testament dispensation ; and a *living*, or perpetual way, which will always continue open as long as the church of God subsists upon earth ; and is the only way to life everlasting. This way is *consecrated*, or set apart for our use, so that we may enter into the Divine presence at all times through Christ, when we plead His incarnation, sufferings, and death, for our acceptance. As the vail of the temple was rent in twain, when He expired upon the cross ; and the holy of holies was exposed to the view of those who were then worshipping in the temple ; so through Christ crucified heaven is opened to the view of His believing people, in consequence of which they are enabled to walk humbly with their God, and to rejoice in hope of obtaining His glory hereafter. And as Christ is gone into heaven as *a High Priest over the house of God, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, and there ever liveth to make intercession for them*

<sup>11</sup> 2 Chronicles xxx. 27.

<sup>12</sup> John i. 29.

*that come unto God by Him;*<sup>13</sup> His church and people are assured of their continual acceptance at the throne of grace in and through Him.

The apostle therefore exhorts, *Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.* How wonderful is it that such an invitation should be given to the sinful children of men, that it should be said to us, *Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you;*<sup>14</sup> that we should be encouraged to draw near into the presence of *the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, who dwelleth in the high and holy place,*<sup>15</sup> and be assured of our acceptance with Him; that we should be directed to *draw near in full assurance of faith,* with the utmost confidence, believing the word of God, relying on the merits of Christ, because He is our Mediator and *the propitiation of our sins,* by which means every obstacle is removed that might otherwise prevent our access into the Divine presence. We are to come *with a true heart,* because *God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*<sup>16</sup> Unless we are in earnest, our worship is but mockery. We must earnestly desire to obtain spiritual blessings from God, or we cannot reasonably hope to receive

<sup>13</sup> Heb. vii. 26, 25. <sup>14</sup> James iv. 8. <sup>15</sup> Isa. lvii. 15. <sup>16</sup> John iv. 24.



them. A double or false heart is most displeasing to Him. His servants must serve Him *in singleness of heart, fearing God.*<sup>17</sup> Our hearts must be *sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*<sup>18</sup> And our bodies must be *washed with pure water, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*<sup>19</sup> according to the Divine promise, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh; and I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments and do them.*<sup>20</sup> And it may also be observed, that it is needful for those who draw near to God, and come to Him for spiritual blessings, also to comply with the outward ordinances which He has appointed to be observed in His church, that they may manifest themselves to be truly devoted to His service; we are to be dedicated to Him by baptism, in token of our obedience to His command.

We are exhorted further, *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that hath promised.* Here we learn that

<sup>17</sup>Col. iii. 22. <sup>18</sup>Heb. xii. 24. <sup>19</sup>Titus iii. 5. <sup>20</sup>Ezek. xxxvi. 25-29.

we *hold fast* our *profession*, not by our own strength, but by depending upon Divine faithfulness. It is by trusting in Him for strength, to be supplied according to our need, that we are to maintain our profession to His honour and glory before the world. And as members of the church, which is His body, we are admonished, *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works.* We are to be *followers of God, as His dear children, and to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.* The more love to God abounds in the heart, the more good works will appear in the conduct. A holy anxiety for the welfare of the church, and the glory of God, are to be kept in view continually. And as the public ordinances of the house of God are a great means for stirring up the desires of the soul towards God and heaven, we are *not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but to exhort one another; and so much the more as we see the day approaching.* The day of death is approaching, when our opportunities for doing these things will have come to an end. But that day which is so awful to the worldling, is the day of life and blessedness to the children of God.

The Epistle for this day is full of the most important matter, which cannot now be dwelt upon at the length that might be wished. I have been able to drop only a few hints on the subject.

The text may be considered as the key to the whole, in which we may briefly notice,

*First*, The nature of the sacrifice of Christ, which we commemorate in a peculiar manner on this day.

*Secondly*, The benefit derived from it; and

*Thirdly*, The character of the persons who receive this benefit.

*First*, The sacrifice of Christ is called His *one offering*. Of this it is said in the preceding chapter, *Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*<sup>21</sup> The *body of Jesus Christ* was offered *once for all*, as a propitiation for sin, which is never to be repeated. This one offering completely answered the end for which it was made. "His one oblation of Himself once offered, was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." He made an offering of Himself as an atonement or propitiation for the sin of man. *He poured out His soul unto death;*<sup>22</sup> and by His blood-shedding and death, suffered the penalty which justice demanded for sin; so that whosoever trusts in His one offering once offered for pardon, has in Him *redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*<sup>23</sup> May

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews ix. 28, 26.    <sup>22</sup> Isaiah liii. 12.    <sup>23</sup> Eph. i. 7.

it be our happiness to be interested in it to the praise of the glory of His grace.

The benefit derived from the offering of Christ is to be noticed

*Secondly.* It perfects for ever those who are interested in it, or as St. John says, *The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin;*<sup>24</sup> and therefore *the worshippers once purged, have no more conscience of sins;* the promise of God under the new covenant being, *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.*<sup>25</sup> The removal of the guilt of sin from the conscience, which has been deeply affected with a sense of its defilement, and with a dread of receiving its wages, or suffering the penalty denounced against transgression, is that which the gospel of Christ proposes. The punishment demanded by Divine justice for the transgression of the holy law, was suffered by our Lord Jesus Christ in His own person, and therefore it shall not fall upon them that believe in His name. They are acquitted for His sake; and it is consequently their privilege to have *fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*<sup>24</sup> It is important that we should have a right understanding on this subject, since our enjoyment of the favour and blessing of God depends upon it. We are to notice,

<sup>24</sup> 1 John i. 7, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews viii. 12.

*Thirdly*, The character of the persons who receive this benefit. They are described as *them that are sanctified*. To be sanctified, means to be set apart for holy purposes, or for the service of God. It was by the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices upon them, that the tabernacle and its vessels and ministers were sanctified under the Mosaical dispensation. It is in consequence of the blood of Christ being applied to the conscience by a living faith, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, that the children of men are sanctified under the Christian dispensation. To be sanctified, also means to be separated from that which is sinful, which defiles or pollutes the soul. Sanctification is holiness of heart and life, or being conformed to the image of Christ in mind and conduct. Without this a profession of faith in Christ is vain. There is no pardon for sin without cleansing from sin; there is no justification without sanctification. All who truly believe in Christ, are numbered among His sanctified people. Let it be our prayer that, by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, we may be manifested to be His people. And bearing this character before the world, may we walk humbly with our God, in communion and fellowship with Him, relying on the one offering of Christ for our pardon and acceptance with God; and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, when we have done with all things here below.

# SERMON XXVI.

FOR

## EASTER DAY.

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SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION.

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Colossians iii. 1.

IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK  
THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE  
CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF  
GOD.

THE resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, is spoken of in the New Testament, not only as a most wonderful event, but also as affording an illustration of the nature of true Christianity, and of the change in heart and life which must take place in those who embrace its doctrines. It pleased God, for the confirmation of the fact, to connect with it a doctrine of the utmost importance; the reception of which must at all times remove every doubt as to the truth of the fact. This doctrine is dwelt upon by our apostle in the sixth chapter of his epistle to the



Romans, the second lesson appointed for this morning's service. There it is said, *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, which is called the likeness of His resurrection, and consists in being made alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, instead of being dead in sins.* In consequence of this, Christians are exhorted, *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof; neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.* A similar use is made of the doctrine of the resurrection in the Epistle for this day. Believers in Christ are here supposed to be *risen with Him*, having been quickened from a death in trespasses and sins; and are therefore exhorted to act suitably to their profession, to seek and pursue, to desire and love heavenly things, and to mortify all their earthly and sensual inclinations, all *the desires of the flesh and of the mind*, which are contrary to the will of their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus.

From the words of the text we may consider,

*First*, The description given of the true character of the believer in Christ; and

*Secondly*, The exhortation founded upon it; which is enlarged on in the Epistle for this day.

May we be numbered among those whose character is here described as that which is pleasing to God; and may the exhortations of His holy word sink deep into our hearts by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, and bring forth fruit in our lives to the glory of His holy name; that we may be Christians, not in profession only, but in deed and in truth, in heart and affection, and in our lives and conduct. The

*First* thing to be noticed is, the description given of the Christian character. This is stated in a hypothetical form with regard to the persons addressed, *If ye be risen with Christ*. The apostle had spoken of it as a matter of fact in the preceding chapter; but he here speaks of it in this manner, in order to lead them to self-examination with regard to their own state individually. He had described them before as *buried with Christ in baptism; wherein, he adds, ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead*. And he states how this great change had taken place. *And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses*. The former condition of these persons, their state by nature, was that of *being dead in their sins*. They were dead to God, not partakers of spiritual life, dead to the knowledge and love of Him, not having the fear of God before their eyes, nor the love of Him in

their hearts. They were alive only to sin; were living in disobedience to the commands and will of God, *fulfilling the natural desires of the flesh and of the mind;*<sup>26</sup> and were in the road to eternal death and misery, as they were living and walking in the enjoyment of those sensual pleasures, *because of which cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.*<sup>26</sup> All who are living in sin are dead to God. All who are walking *according to the course of this world,*<sup>26</sup> having their minds set on earthly things, to the neglect or disregard of spiritual and heavenly things, are in the same state.

The persons spoken of in the text had been delivered from the state of spiritual death in which mankind by nature lie. They were *risen with Christ, through the faith of the operation of God.*<sup>27</sup> *Being justified by faith, they had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Faith in Christ is the means whereby the children of men are made partakers of this spiritual resurrection. This faith is *not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.*<sup>26</sup> He quickens the soul from its death in trespasses and sins. *It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing*<sup>28</sup> in this work of making the soul alive to God. He leads the penitent sinner to *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to rely upon or trust in His atonement, through which is ob-*

<sup>26</sup> Eph. ii. 3, 2, 8; v. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Col. ii. 12.

<sup>28</sup> John vi. 63.

tained the forgiveness of all trespasses. This faith is wrought in the soul by the same Divine power as that which was manifested in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It is said to be *the gift of God*, in order to lead us to apply for it to Him, who *giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not.*<sup>29</sup> And to them that *ask* of God, the promise is, *it shall be given;*<sup>30</sup> they shall not humbly and earnestly ask in vain.

It becomes us to examine ourselves, brethren, whether we are *risen with Christ through the faith of the operation of God*. Have we this faith in Christ, which leads us to trust in His atonement for the pardon of our sins? Are our consciences at peace with God, in consequence of being *justified by faith* in the merits of our Redeemer, and having a good hope through grace that our *sins are forgiven us for His name's sake?*<sup>31</sup> Have we been *quicken'd* from a death *in trespasses and sins*, and made alive to God, so that we are walking *in newness of life*, and seeking grace from Him to enable us to deny all ungodliness, and to walk in His holy ways? These are the marks which the apostle gives us for the purpose of ascertaining who are the persons that are *risen with Christ*. It is important that we should know for ourselves that they belong to us; for those only who are *risen with Christ*

<sup>29</sup> James i. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew vii. 7.

<sup>31</sup> 1 John ii. 12.

by faith, shall rise to the life immortal in His eternal kingdom. It is an easy thing to make a profession of faith in Christ in the present day. It is easy to say that we believe these things. There is no difficulty in that. But really *to live the life which we now live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave Himself for<sup>32</sup> us; and therefore to love Him above all things, and be truly devoted to His service, is another matter. This however is required of us, if we be Christians indeed. We must be dead to sin, so as henceforth not to serve sin; and being made free from sin, become servants to God, as those who are alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord; and walking in newness of life, have our fruit unto, or in a state of, holiness, the end of which is everlasting life.*<sup>33</sup> We are to consider,

*Secondly, The exhortation founded upon the apostle's supposition, which points out the line of conduct that must be pursued by those who profess to be risen with Christ, or to bear the Christian character. The apostle exhorts such persons to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. The object of regard here proposed is Christ seated on the right hand of God, or having all power in heaven and earth,<sup>34</sup> as the Head of His body the church, the Head of all principality and power.*<sup>35</sup> This is said

<sup>32</sup>Gal. ii. 20. <sup>33</sup>Rom. vi. 2, 6, 11, 22. <sup>34</sup>Matt. xxviii. 18. <sup>35</sup>Col. i. 18.



of Him as to His human nature, which *for the suffering of death, is crowned with glory and honour.*<sup>36</sup> He is on the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto Him.<sup>37</sup> God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>38</sup> He is there as the Mediator of the new testament, or the Christian dispensation, to impart to His believing people all the blessings which He came upon earth and was obedient unto death to procure for them. He is there in human nature, to assure us that *we have not a High Priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*<sup>36</sup> In that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted; and therefore we may look up to Him with confidence as a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people;<sup>36</sup> who will undertake our cause when we apply to Him, who will deliver us from the power of all our enemies, and will bring us safe at length to His everlasting glory.

<sup>36</sup> Heb. ii. 9; ix. 15; iv. 15; ii. 17, 18. <sup>37</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 22. <sup>38</sup> Phil. ii. 9, 10.



Having such an Advocate on high, believers in Christ are to *seek those things that are above*, to seek them diligently. The things above are called, *An exceeding and eternal weight of glory; things not seen, and eternal; a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*<sup>39</sup> To these things the people of God in former ages directed their attention. *They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one, a city which God had prepared for them. They looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*<sup>40</sup> These things which are above are worthy of our most ardent desire, and earnest seeking after, worthy of all the labour and pains which we can possibly undergo in pursuit of them. And they are objects which will not disappoint the expectations of those who diligently seek them. The desires of those who obtain them will be fully satisfied. And all who *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*<sup>41</sup> shall most assuredly obtain the blessing. It shall not be denied them. They shall not fail of receiving it. He who is seated on the throne of His glory, and is invested with almighty power, *will give grace and glory*<sup>42</sup> to His waiting people, to the praise of His holy name. This is the encouragement we have to comply with the ex-

<sup>39</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. <sup>40</sup> Heb. xi. 13, 16, 10. <sup>41</sup> Matt. vi. 33.

hortations of the word of God, that obedience to them is not in vain; but *every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*<sup>43</sup> The diligent use of the appointed means will not fail of procuring the promised blessing; not indeed on account of the merit of the seeker, but because of the faithfulness of the Giver to His own word, on which He hath caused us to hope.

But the apostle speaks of things above, not only as worthy of our pursuit, but also of our most ardent affection. He says, *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.* Our whole soul, as it were, is to be set upon the attainment of spiritual and heavenly blessings. There is nothing so worthy of our regard as the *things above*. Here is scope for the exercise of our best affections, which will not be misplaced when set upon these things. The *things on earth*, on the contrary, are transitory and unsatisfying. All here *is vanity and vexation of spirit.*<sup>44</sup> At one time the mind of man is elated with vanity; at another time it is depressed with vexation of spirit. Let us not set our affection on those things which perish in the using, and which give no solid or lasting pleasure; but let us seek for that *fulness of joy and those pleasures for evermore,*<sup>42</sup> which are to be found in the things above.

<sup>42</sup> Psalm lxxxiv. 11; xvi. 11. <sup>43</sup> Matt. vii. 8. <sup>44</sup> Eccl. i. 14.

The apostle gives his reasons why the affection of Christians should be set on things above. *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* So he says to the Romans, *We are buried with Christ by baptism into death; we are planted together with Him in the likeness of His death; our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed. We are dead with Christ, and we believe that we shall also live with Him.* And therefore he declares respecting believers in Christ, *Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace; and he that is dead is freed from sin.* He who is dead with Christ, is dead to sin, so that he cannot live in it, or take pleasure in it. The spiritual life which is derived from Christ, by which the souls of believers are united to God, is a hidden life, it is concealed from the view of the world, the people of the world know nothing of it, understand nothing about it, cannot tell who is possessed of it, or who is not. It is a matter entirely between the believer and his God. But if we have received spiritual life from Christ, it will lead us to seek for the enjoyment of communion with God as our greatest pleasure. This is the way in which the life of God in the soul discovers itself. The soul which is alive to God cannot be satisfied without continual intercourse with Him. It breathes itself out, as it were, in prayer and praise to the God of its mercies.

The heart which is quickened and renewed by Divine grace is raised upwards to God and heaven. Through Christ it has *access by the Spirit unto the Father*;<sup>45</sup> and there reposes its desires and affections; and from thence receives all its impulses, whereby it is manifested to be a new heart, and is enabled to praise and glorify God, and also to direct the conduct in life, so that the believer seeks to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

The apostle proceeds to give another reason for his exhortation: *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.* He, from whose grace the spiritual life of His people is derived, and by whom it is maintained and supported day by day, while they are sojourning in this world; who came to visit us in great humility, and suffered, bled, and died for our redemption; will appear again, not in a state of humiliation, but with power and great glory. *Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, unto their salvation*;<sup>46</sup> according to His promise to His disciples, *I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you: I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also*.<sup>47</sup> Christians are therefore directed to be *looking for that blessed hope, even the*

<sup>45</sup> Eph. ii. 18.    <sup>46</sup> Heb. ix. 28.    <sup>47</sup> John xvi. 22; xiv. 3.

*glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,*<sup>48</sup> *when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day;*<sup>49</sup> *to be waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm them unto the end, that they may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ;*<sup>50</sup> *for then shall they also appear with Him in glory.* When the mind of the beloved disciple was directed to this glorious subject, he was filled with the most transporting joy, so that he exclaimed, *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. 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.*<sup>51</sup> Then His believing people shall be glorified together with Him.

Surely here is sufficient inducement to lead us to seek diligently, and to set our affection on the things above. But, oh! how slow of heart are we to believe all these things, and to consider that the great end of our existence is not the occupying of a station in this world. The circumstances in which we may be placed in this life, are of very little moment in comparison with what will be our condition in eternity. Did we meditate

<sup>48</sup> Titus ii. 13. <sup>49</sup> 2 Thess. i. 10. <sup>50</sup> 1 Cor. i. 7, 8. <sup>51</sup> 1 John iii. 1, 2.

more on the things which God hath prepared hereafter for them that wait for Him and serve Him here on earth, we should be persuaded that the things of this life, however important they may seem to be, *are not worthy to be compared with* things eternal.

Earthly things are, however, those on which the affections of all mankind are naturally set. Their whole attention is absorbed by the cares or the pleasures of this world, and they give their minds to nothing beyond it. The great inquiry of numbers is, *What shall we eat, or, What shall we drink, or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?* The minds of others are occupied by things respecting this world, which are very useful in society, but were never designed to be the sole object of pursuit to an immortal being. The things of the earth do indeed require our attention in some degree. We have duties to perform as inhabitants of this world, which are not to be disregarded or neglected. The Christian is to fulfil all the relative duties of life as a good member of society. But in the midst of all this, his heart is to be given up to God, his desires and affections are to centre in things above. He is not to take the opinion of the world for his guidance in the things of God, but to be governed and directed by the word and will of God. He is to be dead to the earth, or to those things which are *earthly, sensual, and devilish*; to be dead to sin,



so as not to live in the practice of what is forbidden in the word of God. The apostle accordingly exhorts us, *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.* All our natural inclinations and desires after these things are to be mortified; and the practice of them is to be totally renounced, since it is added, *For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.* All who live in the indulgence of these things, are under the wrath of God, and it is declared respecting them that they *shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* The Colossians were reminded that these were their practices as heathens, *In the which ye also walked sometime, or formerly, when ye lived in them;* but they had, through Divine grace, in consequence of believing the gospel of Christ, *put off the old man with his deeds, and had put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, where Christ is all in all.*

It would be happy indeed if those practices which are stated to involve the most fatal consequences, were unknown in countries professedly Christian. But, alas! the most transient observation evinces that this is not the case. How great is the number of those who are the servants of the world and the flesh, even while they call themselves Christians. How many, who bear this

honourable name, and would think themselves deeply injured if their title to it were called in question, are notwithstanding living in the habitual indulgence of those sins, which are here said to expose them to the wrath of God, living in them without concern, in a state of hardness of heart, impenitence, and unbelief. Many others who are thought to be very moral and good sort of people, are filled with worldly-mindedness, thinking only of the things of this life, and have their minds or ideas entirely bounded by the things of time and sense, as if there were no eternity. The sensual and the worldly-minded are both of them dead to God, both of them instigated in their various pursuits by *the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*, the enemy of God, the destroyer of the souls of men. They are living without *hope, and without God in the world*,<sup>52</sup> or as if there were no God, to whom they are indebted for *life and breath and all things*,<sup>53</sup> whom it is their duty to obey, and to whom they must give an account of the deeds done in the body. They are not in the way to heaven. What a miserable portion is all that this world can give; and yet how eagerly is it sought after by multitudes, and even by some who make a profession of religion, and boast of the excellency and superiority of true

<sup>52</sup> Ephesians ii. 2, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Acts xvii. 25.

Christianity. So lamentable is the inconsistency of fallen man. Oh! that such might see their error before it is too late, and while the door of mercy is open, *flee from the wrath to come.*

And let us, brethren, who have come to the house of God to commemorate the dying love and rising power of our most adorable Redeemer, not be contented with merely making an outward profession of Christianity; but while we call to mind His glorious resurrection, let us *seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*; and look forward in hope that *when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.* As this hope is set before us through His bloodshedding and death, let us *do in remembrance of Him*, as He commanded His disciples to do; let us, in the use of the ordinance of His appointment, “feed on Him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving,” and be thankful that His blood was shed for our redemption; that He died that we might live, *the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.* And let us manifest that we are indeed *risen with Christ*, by setting our *affection on things above*; by living above the world, in communion and fellowship with our heavenly Father; by walking humbly with Him, in obedience to His holy will and commandments, and looking forward in hope to the glory which is to be revealed at the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

## SERMON XXVII.

FOR THE

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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THE RECORD OF GOD.

---

1 John v. 11, 12.

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.

THE record here spoken of is the sum and substance of Divine revelation, from the beginning to the end of the inspired volume. It was made known to our first parents in the denunciation pronounced upon their tempter and deceiver, *the old serpent and Satan*, that the Seed of the woman should bruise his head; and the knowledge of it was vouchsafed *at sundry times and in divers manners* to the patriarchs and prophets, until the appointed season for its fulfilment arrived, when, as our apostle states, *the Life was manifested*, even

*that eternal Life which was with the Father from the beginning, was manifested unto us ; when God was manifested in the flesh to be the Redeemer of fallen man ; and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,<sup>54</sup> that He might put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and become the Author of eternal salvation to all them that believe in and obey Him.<sup>55</sup>*

The Epistle for this day begins with stating the source from whence spiritual life in the soul of man is derived, the manner in which it discovers itself, and the means whereby it operates. *Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* Spiritual life is derived from being born of God. The Evangelist informs us, that when *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name ; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.<sup>56</sup>* So important is this new birth, that our Saviour Himself declared, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the*

54 Phil. ii. 8.

55 Heb. ix. 26 ; v. 9.

56 John i. 11—14.

*kingdom of God.* For as *that which is born of the flesh, is flesh,* or partakes of that natural life which qualifies it for this world; so *that only which is born of the Spirit of God is spirit,*<sup>57</sup> or partakes of that spiritual life which qualifies it for an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. To the natural mind the world presents the highest source of gratification. To walk *according to the course of this world,*<sup>58</sup> so as to be spoken well of by all around us, is most gratifying to human nature. The world presents objects of attraction, which are commonly found to be irresistible by those who have the opportunity of enjoying them. *The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,*<sup>59</sup> have, one or the other of them, dominion over all mankind. In the days of youth and health especially, how little else is regarded by multitudes than self-gratification in the sight of the eyes, or in the wandering of the desire, or in the idea of our own superiority to others. But he that *is born of God overcometh the world,* by faith in the Son of God, and in the exercise of self-denial in these respects. He seeks his pleasure in what is more lasting and substantial than any thing which this world can give. He sets his *affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*<sup>60</sup> He seeks for purer joys than this world affords. And this he does, because

<sup>57</sup> John iii. 3, 6.   <sup>58</sup> Eph. ii. 2.   <sup>59</sup> 1 John ii. 16.   <sup>60</sup> Col. iii. 2.



he *walks by faith and not by sight*. He believes the record of the word of God respecting Himself as a sinner who is guilty and self-condemned before God, and has need of pardoning mercy and reconciliation with God, in order to his happiness and salvation. Respecting this present evil world, he is convinced that it cannot satisfy the desires of the immortal soul; and respecting Jesus Christ, he believes that He *came into the world to save sinners*,<sup>61</sup> and is able to save, and willing to save, all that come to Him for the blessings of His grace. And being made a partaker of the Divine influence of the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ, he is enabled to overcome the world, to resist its snares and temptations, and to disregard its frowns and threatenings. He can take up the language of the Psalmist, *The Lord is on my side, I will not fear: In God I have put my trust, I will not fear what flesh can do unto me; for He shall send from heaven and save me*.<sup>62</sup> It is not in his own strength, for that is unequal to the conflict; but through a reliance on his almighty Protector, or a child-like dependence upon the power and grace of his almighty and most merciful Father, that *he that is born of God overcometh the world*. It is the believer in Christ alone who thus gives evidence that he is truly a child of God. The apostle

<sup>61</sup> 1 Timothy i. 15.    <sup>62</sup> Psalm cxviii. 6; lvi. 4; lvii. 3.

therefore asks, *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* No other person but the true Christian, whose mind is set upon attaining the salvation of Christ, is able to do this. To believe *that Jesus is the Son of God*, is to receive Him in the character of the Divinely-promised and appointed Saviour of mankind. *The only begotten Son of God is the only Saviour of the world.* There is *no salvation in any other, there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*<sup>63</sup> And it is testified of Him, that *He gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God, and our Father;*<sup>64</sup> and therefore His believing people are delivered from its dominion, and overcome it by faith in His name, or relying on His Divine power.

The apostle next refers to the characteristics of the Christian dispensation, and the most prominent features in the public ministry of Christ. *This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ.* He entered upon His public ministry *by water*, being baptised by John the Baptist in the river of Jordan; He concluded it *by blood*, His blood having been shed upon the cross. He came *not by water only*; not merely calling upon men to submit to outward baptism as John did;

<sup>63</sup> Acts iv. 12.

<sup>64</sup> Galatians i. 4.

but *by water and blood*, both to cleanse from sin *by the washing of regeneration*, and to make an atonement for sin, by the shedding of His own precious blood. He came to be *the propitiation for our sins*,<sup>65</sup> because *without shedding of blood is no remission*;<sup>66</sup> and therefore it is declared that *in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins*,<sup>67</sup> and that *the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin*.<sup>68</sup> This could not be effected by water, by any outward cleansing. Faith in *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*,<sup>68</sup> is needful in order to the pardon of sin. *And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.* The Spirit of God bears witness of this in His holy word; and this has been the great object of the testimony of the Spirit of God to the hearts and consciences of His people from the beginning. Our Saviour referred to this witness of the Spirit respecting Himself, when He promised His disciples before He left them, *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me*.<sup>68</sup> It is the office of the Holy Spirit, in the economy of the covenant of redemption, to bear witness of the salvation of Christ, and to glorify Him in the hearts of His people.

<sup>65</sup> 1 John ii. 2; i. 7. <sup>66</sup> Heb. ix. 22. <sup>67</sup> Eph. i. 7. <sup>68</sup> John i. 29; xv. 26.

In this testimony to the person and work of Christ, both heaven and earth agree, it being of the utmost importance that it should be believed, or that His great salvation should be embraced by the children of men. It is therefore asserted, *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.* Testimony to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus is borne by the most "holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God," the Triune Jehovah. It is the chief object of the revelation of God to man to bear testimony concerning the bloodshedding and death of the Son of God, as the ransom for sin. The Father of heaven bore this testimony at the baptism of Christ, and at His transfiguration on the holy mount; on both of which occasions *He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came to Him such a voice from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*<sup>69</sup> *The Word, who was in the beginning, with God, and was God, Himself bore this testimony, when He was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and His disciples beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*<sup>70</sup> The Holy Ghost bore it, when the angelic message was fulfilled, which was delivered to the virgin Mary, *The Holy Ghost shall*

<sup>69</sup> 2 Peter i. 17.

<sup>70</sup> John i. 1, 2, 14.

*come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God;*<sup>71</sup> and when at His baptism, *John saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him; and he saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God.*<sup>72</sup> Thus when *Jesus Christ came by water*, or was baptized in the river Jordan, this testimony of the Divine approbation of the work which He had undertaken, was most evidently borne to the eyes of mankind. And when His precious blood was shed upon the cross, it was borne also by the darkness which covered the face of the sky; by the rending of the vail of the temple from the top to the bottom; by His triumphant shout before He expired, which made the centurion exclaim, *Truly this was the Son of God;*<sup>73</sup> by the rending of the rocks, and the quaking of the earth, and the opening of the graves, which accompanied His yielding up the ghost. It was borne also by His rising from the grave, when He was *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead;*<sup>74</sup> and by His ascension to heaven in the sight of His astonished disciples, when He was *received up into glory, and sat on the right hand of God, having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth, as the*

<sup>71</sup> Luke i. 35. <sup>72</sup> John i. 32, 34. <sup>73</sup> Matt. xxvii. 54. <sup>74</sup> Rom. i. 4.

*Lord of all.* In all these particulars the united testimony of the Triune Jehovah to the person and work of Christ, appeared most conspicuously.

This verse has been greatly objected to on account of its speaking so plainly of the Trinity of the Persons in the Godhead, and the Unity of the essence. But it bears the usual mark of genuineness which appears in other passages of scripture, from its introducing the subject indirectly, and not being inserted merely for the purpose of declaring that great truth of our holy religion without any other object. Our apostle states the same great truth of the doctrine of the Trinity, also in an incidental manner, in the preceding chapter; *Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His SPIRIT; and we have seen, and do testify, that the FATHER sent the SON to be the Saviour of the world.* Here the three sacred Persons of the ever blessed Trinity are mentioned, and the office assigned to each in the economy of the covenant of redemption is adverted to. Many similar passages might be collected from the apostolical writings. And the doctrine was taught most plainly by our blessed Saviour in His last long discourse with His disciples, which is recorded by St. John.

The apostle proceeds to mention the earthly testimony to the person and work of Christ, which corresponded with the heavenly one. *And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit*



*and the water and the blood ; and these three agree in one.* The Spirit which descended on Him in an especial manner at His entrance upon His public ministry, which is frequently referred to by the Evangelists, bore this testimony. St. Luke says, *The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon Him ; and again, Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.*<sup>75</sup> In consequence of this visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon our blessed Saviour, John the Baptist *bare record that this is the Son of God ;* and afterwards declared that *God gave not the Spirit by measure or partially, but superabundantly, unto Him.* For *the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand ;* and therefore, *He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*<sup>76</sup> This Spirit of God, which visibly descended on the Man Christ Jesus ; together with *the water* of baptism, by which He was designated to be the Messiah ; and *the blood* which He shed upon the cross for the redemption of mankind ; *these three agree in one* united testimony to the truth of the gospel of Christ. The testimony of earthly witnesses is received by mankind, when it is clearly stated ; as our Saviour said to the Jews, *It is written in your law that the testi-*

<sup>75</sup> Luke iii. 2 ; iv. 1.      <sup>76</sup> John i. 34 ; iii. 34, 35 ; viii. 17.

*mony of two men is true.*<sup>76</sup> But if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. The Spirit, the water, and the blood, gave testimony to the senses of mankind, affording visible evidence of the nature of the Christian dispensation, and of the benefits which are conferred by it; or, that pardon of sin, and cleansing from sin, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, were the blessings bestowed by means of it.

Since we have the testimony of heavenly witnesses, as well as of earthly ones, to the truth of the gospel of Christ, it may well be asked, *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?* The testimony of God should be received with the most profound reverence and humility. He has given testimony concerning His Son, which it is of the utmost importance that mankind should receive, since without receiving it, their immortal souls cannot be saved. *For this testimony referred to is the witness of God, which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself;* that is, he receives the testimony of God into his heart and mind; whereby he has internal proof of its truth, a heartfelt conviction wrought in his mind by the Holy Spirit, by which he is enabled to believe the testimony of God. While, on the other hand, *he that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.* In





... first announces.  
... we were in-  
... eternal salvation  
... reception

How wonderful  
... bestowed upon such re-  
... features as we are: upon  
... rebellion against God, had  
... incurred His displeasure,  
... His wrath and indig-  
... His infinite love and compassion  
... He bestows this gift freely,  
... upon the  
... those who were under  
... the wages of sin, He  
... gives eternal life. He does this, however, not in  
... His justice and  
... holiness; by providing a sacrifice for sin in the  
... by the shedding of whose blood a propitiation has  
... *He might be just, and the  
Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.*<sup>80</sup> Thus He  
... His law should be magnified and  
... made honourable, while He pardoned the guilty  
... transgressor. What a wonderful provision of  
... Let us contemplate it with  
... gratitude, adoration, and praise.









... the lower. Divine  
 ... the same ...  
 ... the ...  
 ... were such.<sup>83</sup> yet  
 ... were not to account  
 ... servants of Christ.  
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 ... were exhorted to be contented in  
 ... by the will of God,  
 ... being  
 ... the Lord's freeman. The apostle  
 therefore addressed such: *Art thou called being  
 a servant? care not for it; but if thou mayest be  
 made free, use it rather.*<sup>84</sup> They needed not to  
 trouble themselves about being in slavery; al-  
 though they might gladly and thankfully embrace  
 an opportunity of being made free, which was

<sup>83</sup> John vii. 48.    <sup>84</sup> 1 Cor. i. 26; vii. 21, 22.    <sup>85</sup> Phil. iv. 22.





suffered for our sins. And we are told that, *He was tempted in every point, like as we are, yet without sin.*<sup>87</sup> He suffered, who had no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. We suffer because we are sinners. Sin has introduced into the world all the misery that is found in it. Sin brought death into the world, and all our woe. If we were not sinners we should not know what suffering is. But our bodies are a prey to various diseases, and to death itself, because we are fallen creatures, who have inherited a corrupt nature and a tainted frame from our parents and ancestors; and have additional cause of suffering on account of our own transgressions. But Christ *did no sin, knew no sin,*<sup>87</sup> *in Him was no sin;*<sup>88</sup> and therefore He could not have suffered had He not willingly done so, in order to effect some great end or purpose. No guile or deceit was in Him. What He said of Nathanael was most true of Himself; *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*<sup>89</sup> His mouth ever uttered what His heart dictated. No hypocrisy was ever practised by Him in any degree whatever. In all this He hath left us an example, that we should follow His steps, and thus manifest ourselves to be truly His disciples.

<sup>87</sup> Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15. <sup>88</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21. <sup>89</sup> 1 John iii. 5. <sup>90</sup> 1 John i. 47.























is to be content in his father's house; but who  
 has no such blessing the man has place of con-  
 sideration in the world, residence. We are here  
 in the world for a short time, and then we quit it  
 forever. The shortness and uncertainty of life is  
 a great subject because the wise as well as  
 the foolish are apt to slumber and sleep,  
 while the *Boogymann* tarrys. How are the  
 children of men disposed to make this world  
 their home, and to look for and desire nothing  
 there or better. How few are willing to adopt  
 the language of Job, *I would not live alway, for  
 we know our vanity.*<sup>14</sup> It is not on account of the  
 vanity, the sin and folly which abounds in the  
 world, that we are usually desirous to quit it.  
 It is only when affliction of mind, body, or estate  
 come, that mankind, in a fit of despair, would,  
 for a moment, choose death rather than life, on  
 account of the miseries which press upon them.  
 They feel the effects of sin, and would wish to  
 avoid them; but sin itself, the cause of all the  
 evil that is in the world, they abhor not. The  
 characteristic of the multitude of mankind is,  
*they are of the world;*<sup>15</sup> their desires are confined  
 to the things of time and sense. How to enjoy  
 this life, is all their aim. What is *earthly, sen-  
 sual and devilish,*<sup>16</sup> is their pursuit. But we find,  
 in the text, that the children of God are

<sup>14</sup> Job vii. 16.

<sup>15</sup> 1 John iv. 5.

<sup>16</sup> James iii. 15.



The state of the Chinese  
is the reverse of that of the  
Sinites. As a migrant or sojourner upon earth,  
he does not dwell among his own people. He  
is like a person in a foreign land, who is living  
among a people whose language and customs  
are different from his own. The people of the  
west are not the children of his heavenly  
Emperor; therefore he is in this world, he feels  
to be among foreigners; and, like Jacob,

These, his spiritual enemies, war against his soul. They are seeking his destruction, and will not be at peace with him all his days upon earth. It is needful therefore that he should be constantly on his guard against them, lest they should subvert his soul. His carnal mind, the flesh with its affections and lusts, is continually pleading for indulgence. And unless he deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Christ, it will prevail against him. The consideration of the state to which he is called by Divine grace, *to be holy and without blame before God in love,*<sup>23</sup> *to walk so as to please God,*<sup>24</sup> and not to be governed by the customs and maxims of the people of the world in these things; and of his expectation hereafter to be at home with the Lord in His eternal kingdom and glory—the consideration of these things is calculated to repress his desire for gratifying the evil propensities of his fallen nature; and therefore the apostle reminds Christians of their state and expectations for this purpose. As the believer in Christ would desire the salvation of his soul, and dread its destruction, he will therefore *abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.* He will *possess his vessel, his body, in sanctification and honour.*<sup>25</sup> And this, not only for his own sake, but also that he may afford an example to others of the effects

<sup>23</sup> Eph. i. 4; ii. 3.    <sup>24</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 1, 4.    <sup>25</sup> Rom. xiii. 1, 5.



produced by the principles of Christianity upon the life and conduct of those who receive the truth in the love of it. Therefore he not only abstains from these things as it respects himself; in consequence of being influenced by the fear of God, he does not seek for the gratification of *the desires of the flesh and of the mind;*<sup>23</sup> but, further, as the apostle exhorts Christians to have their *conversation*, or whole conduct and behaviour, *honest*, or good, *among the Gentiles*, he endeavours to be exemplary in all his conduct before the world. Were the power of Christianity co-extensive with the profession of it, this would be the case with all who bear the Christian name.

This good conduct, the apostle shows, is to be manifested especially by subjection to the authority of the civil magistrate. Christians are to be good subjects to *the powers that be*, which are *ordained of God*. They will be such, *not only for wrath*, not only for fear of punishment, *but for conscience sake*, for the Lord's sake.<sup>25</sup> Rulers are of God's appointment for the punishment of evil doers. Without them, there would be nothing but disorder and confusion in the world. The common accusation against Christians, in the primitive ages, was, that they were desirous of overturning the government. But a more groundless charge could not be preferred against them. Because they spoke of another King, even Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master, the heathen ac-

cused them falsely of acting contrary to the decrees of Cesar, the Roman emperor. This was the only way that the Gentiles could excite their rulers to oppose Christianity. The apostle therefore thought it needful to instruct Christians, among other things, respecting their duty to the government of the country in which they resided; and showed them that it was their duty conscientiously to submit to it *for the Lord's sake*, in obedience to His commands, because *it was the will of God respecting them, that with well doing they should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, who were accustomed to speak evil against them as evil doers. *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as to 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.* At the same time, the apostle reminded them that they were not called upon, by the submission to royal authority which was required of them as Christians, to give up their civil liberties. *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.* They were to act as freemen. They might lawfully claim their civil rights and immunities, as the apostle Paul claimed his, being a Roman citizen, when occasion required. But they were to be-

ware of *using their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness*, or a covering for wickedness of any kind; under all circumstances, remembering that their highest privilege was to be *the servants of God*; and therefore at all times to act as became that character.

This consideration, that they were *the servants of God*, would lead them, in obedience to His command, to *honour all men*, and especially all superiors, as some have thought this exhortation to mean particularly, to *love the brotherhood*, or their brethren in Christ Jesus, the children of God, who have God for their Father; to *fear God*, to reverence Him as their supreme Governor; and to *honour the king*, as being appointed by the ordinance of God, *for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well*. Where Christian principles operate, obedience to civil government will be manifested. It is the absence of Christian principle which occasions all sedition and rebellion against the constituted authorities of the country in which we live. No Christian is justified in taking up arms against a legal government. On the contrary, it is the bounden duty of the children of God to *pray for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour*. And we find that such good conduct will not be

without producing its effect. For a reason given in the text why it should be adopted is, that those who *speak against Christians as evil doers, may, by their good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.* This is the

*Third* point to which our attention is to be directed. It is for the glory of God, that those who profess to adhere to His cause, should act consistently with their profession, in obedience to His word and will. And the glory of God is the great object which His people should always propose to themselves. It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, as well as our reasonable service, that we should do this. And them that honour Him, He will honour. The good works, the upright conduct of the children of God, is calculated to remove, in some measure, the prejudice which the people of the world naturally entertain against them. A time is mentioned when God will be glorified by the consistent conduct of His people, in an especial manner, that is, *in the day of their visitation.* This may be explained in a two-fold manner; either as a visitation of mercy, or a visitation of wrath. We find our blessed Saviour weeping over Jerusalem, *because she knew not the time of her visitation.*<sup>26</sup> This was the time when He, in His mercy and grace, visited her in great humility. So, when the mercy and grace of God are made known to the hearts of the children of men, it is a con-

firmation to them of the truth of the word of God, if they have had an opportunity of beholding the good conduct of believers in Christ. While, on the other hand, the inconsistency of professors of religion is a great stumbling block to many, and is considered in numberless instances by the people of the world, who are peculiarly sharp-sighted on this subject, to be a full justification of themselves in their disobedience to the gospel; though it will be found a miserable subterfuge to those who avail themselves of it; since the truth of the word of God is not to be ascertained by the good or bad conduct of sinful men. When that *day of visitation* shall arrive, in which the great *Shepherd and Bishop of souls* shall appear in power and great glory, as the Judge of the living and the dead, God will be glorified by means of the holy conduct which shall have been manifested in His people. When He shall *render to every man according to his deeds*,<sup>27</sup> it will be found that His grace has not been inoperative, but has produced the *peaceable fruit of righteousness*<sup>28</sup> in the hearts and lives of those who are influenced by it. And this will redound *to the praise of the glory of His grace*,<sup>29</sup> in the salvation of His believing people; and to the vindication of His justice in the condemnation of the ungodly.

<sup>26</sup> Luke xix. 44.   <sup>27</sup> Rom. ii. 6.   <sup>28</sup> Heb. xii. 11.   <sup>29</sup> Eph. i. 6.

Of this *day of visitation* we have many intimations in the holy scriptures. St. Peter says, *The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; and he therefore exhorts those who are warned of it, to be looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, in all holy conversation and godliness; to be diligent that they may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*<sup>30</sup> As we know not how soon this *day of visitation* may come upon us, it is our wisdom to be prepared to meet it, that it may not be a day of terror and alarm, of confusion and dismay, to us, but a day of rest and peace. It is said respecting it, *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.*<sup>31</sup> How dreadful will the day of His appearing be to His enemies, to those who have rejected or neglected the gospel of His grace, and would not have Him to reign over them! They will then be banished for ever from His blissful presence. But He will also *come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day.*<sup>31</sup> How will they hail His coming! If we are numbered among the saints, His believing people,

<sup>30</sup> 2 Peter iii. 10, 12, 14.   <sup>31</sup> 2 Thess. i. 7—10.   <sup>32</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 11.



who *are washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,*<sup>32</sup> this *day of visitation* will be a day of joy to us; but not otherwise. Those who do not *abstain from fleshly lusts*, whose *conversation* is not *honest*, whose conduct is not good and upright before men, will not be able to abide that *day of visitation*. And all who have not really come to Christ for pardon and salvation, will be found in this awful state. The tree must be made good before the fruit can be truly good. We must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to the salvation of our souls. Until faith in Christ take possession of the heart, all attempts to keep the law of God will be futile and vain. Until a new principle be received from above, all human efforts to withstand the world, the flesh, and the devil, will be unavailing; the weakness of man cannot but fall, without Divine aid, under the power of his subtil and mighty adversaries. Resistance is hopeless, unless the strength of Christ be made perfect in our weakness. But His grace is sufficient for those who wait upon Him to bestow it. Divine aid is promised to the humble believer in Christ, but cannot be obtained otherwise than by faith in Him. For it is to those alone who *have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins*, that *grace to help in time of need* is promised.

Let it be our concern then to ascertain that we are really numbered among those who believe *and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*. And if we profess that His merits are the ground of our hope toward God, let us remember *what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness*, as the saints of God in whom He will be glorified *in the day of visitation*. Let us look up to God as our Father, and to heaven as our home. Let us *walk humbly with our God*, in communion and fellowship with Him. Let us live in submission to His authority, as our King, doing His will in all things from the heart. Let us live as *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*, looking for that *city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God*. Let us seek to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; and to love His people; saying, with the Psalmist, *I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of such as love Thy testimonies*. Let us love His word and His ordinances. And while we name *the name of Christ*, let us *depart from all iniquity*. Thus let us live to the glory of God while here below, that *in the day of visitation*, we may be owned by the Judge of all the earth as His people, and may *enter into the joy of our Lord*.

# SERMON XXX.

FOR THE

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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THE FIRST FRUITS UNTO GOD.

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James i. 18.

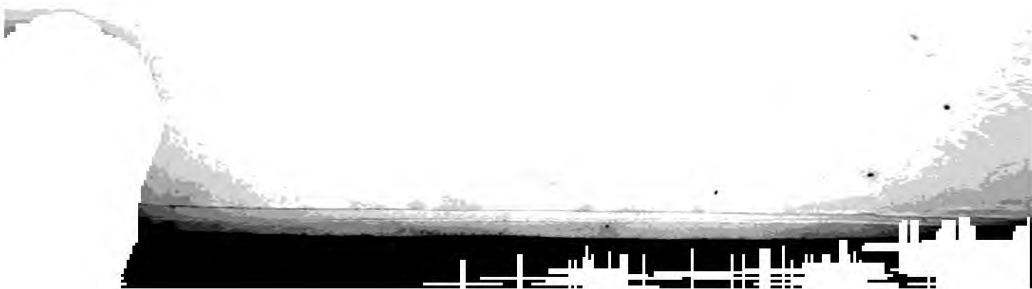
OF HIS OWN WILL BEGAT HE US, WITH THE  
WORD OF TRUTH, THAT WE SHOULD BE A  
KIND OF FIRST FRUITS OF HIS CREATURES.

THE Epistle for this day commences with the observation, that *every good gift and every perfect gift is from above*; or that every blessing we enjoy is bestowed by God. This appears to be stated for the purpose of correcting an erroneous idea which was entertained by some persons, that sin could not be avoided, because, as they pretended, temptations to sin were from God, as well as every thing else. This idea the apostle thinks it needful to refute. He asserts that no man has a right to say that he is tempted of God to sin, for *God cannot be tempted with evil*, He cannot

possibly tempt any man to commit sin; it is contrary to His nature, which abhors sin. Temptation to sin proceeds rather from the corrupt propensity of the depraved heart of man, which seeks gratification in what God has forbidden. Sinful deeds ensue; and sin brings death in its train. The awful consequences of sin are sufficient to show, that temptation to it does not in any way come from God. On the contrary, nothing but what is good, nothing but what is perfect, *is from above*. Every thing of this kind which we enjoy, *cometh down from the Father of lights*. The name here given to God shows His opposition to all sin, which is known by the name of *the works of darkness*.<sup>33</sup> He is so infinitely holy, so transcendently excellent and good, that *with Him is no variableness*, not the slightest variation from perfect rectitude, not even *a shadow of turning* aside from it in the least degree; so that no iniquity whatever can be ascribed to Him. *A God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He*.<sup>34</sup> The apostle having given this description of the Divine Being, and vindicated His character from the misapprehensions that had been formed respecting it, applies the subject in the text and following verses, in order to show what manner of persons the children of God ought to be.

<sup>33</sup> Romans xiii. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Deuteronomy xxxii. 4.



*First*, He mentions their peculiar obligations to the Father of lights. *Of His own will begat He us.* This was the source of their blessedness. It was to be ascribed alone to the good pleasure of His goodness, that they were numbered among the children of God, or adopted into His family. It did not proceed from any merit of their own.

*Secondly*, He states what was the mean or instrument of their regeneration or spiritual birth. It was *with the word of truth* that they were begotten of God.

*Thirdly*, He shows the object proposed by God in admitting mankind into the relationship of children to Himself, which was, *that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures*; the characteristics of which are described in the remainder of the Epistle for this day.

May the consideration of this subject, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, lead each of us to self-examination and prayer; that we may use the means with a view to the attainment of the end, and may be indeed fruitful in every good work, to the glory of God.

*First*, The source of regenerating grace is here resolved into the will of God our heavenly Father, *the Father of lights.* *Of His own will begat He us.* In the epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul speaks on this subject in the same manner: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all*

*spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love ; having predestinated us unto 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 Beloved. And again, In whom also we have obtained an inheritance ; being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.*<sup>35</sup> This doctrine, that all good comes to the children of men from the will of God, is stated in order to encourage us to seek the blessings of His grace at His hands ; and not for our discouragement. It is the will of God that the children of men should become His children ; and He has shown it to be so, by sending to us His holy word, the revelation of His mercy and grace to fallen man. *He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.*<sup>36</sup> *He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*<sup>37</sup> All this proceeds from His infinite goodness, because He delighteth in mercy. The will of God is elsewhere called, *The good pleasure of His goodness.*<sup>38</sup> As to His secret will, with regard to the vessels of mercy, this is a subject with which we have nothing

<sup>35</sup> Eph. i. 3—6, 11. <sup>36</sup> Luke vi. 35. <sup>37</sup> Matt. v. 45. <sup>38</sup> 2 Thess. i. 11.



to do, any further than it respects ourselves individually. It is a subject which, with all our searching, we cannot fathom; and therefore it is useless for us to endeavour to pry into it. The character of the children of God is made known to us in His holy word, in order that we may ascertain our own by the description which is there given. In it we are assured that those who are the children of God, who look up to Him as their Father, become such, *because it pleased the Lord to make them His people*. Their utmost gratitude is therefore due to Him for His goodness and grace, which have been manifested to their souls. And they are thereby encouraged to expect from Him all the blessings which accompany salvation; and to depend upon Him for the grace which they need for enabling them to act as becometh the children of their Father, and to oppose their spiritual enemies, who are endeavouring, by their various temptations, to subvert their souls, and to hinder them from enjoying that happiness of which it is their privilege to partake, in communion and fellowship with their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus.

The apostle having led Christians to contemplate the source from whence regenerating grace is derived, even from the *good will* of God to man, proceeds to mention,

*Secondly*, The means whereby the change which had taken place in them was brought about.

They had been begotten of God, had been made His children, had been adopted into His family; and it was *with the word of truth* that this new birth had been effected. St. Peter ascribes the same effect to the same cause. He says to believers in Christ, *Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*<sup>39</sup> So St. Paul rejoiced respecting the Colossians, *The word of the truth of the gospel is come unto you, and bringeth forth fruit in you, since the day ye heard it, and knew the grace of God in truth.*<sup>40</sup> And he gave thanks to God for the Thessalonians, *because God had from the beginning chosen them to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.*<sup>41</sup> It is by the belief of *the word of the truth of the gospel* concerning the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, that the children of men become the children of God. This *faith cometh by hearing*;<sup>42</sup> yet it is *the gift of God*; and is therefore to be sought from Him in the use of the appointed means of grace. Our blessed Lord commanded His apostles to *go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,*<sup>43</sup> that believing on Him, they *should not perish, but have everlasting life.*<sup>44</sup> Here then we see the great importance of *the word of truth*, the testimony

<sup>39</sup> 1 Peter i. 22, 23. <sup>40</sup> Col. i. 5, 6. <sup>41</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 13. <sup>42</sup> Rom. x. 17.

concerning Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners. We may attend to other things, or may disregard them, without being greatly affected by the consequences. But not so with *the word of truth*. If we receive *the truth in the love of it*, we become the children of God, and are brought into the way of salvation. But if *the word of truth* be neglected by us, it is to the danger of our souls; if it be despised and rejected, we are thereby ensuring, as far as in us lies, our own condemnation. So our Saviour said, *He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*<sup>45</sup> *The word of truth* then, as it is the means of regeneration in those who believe it, for they are thereby made the children of God and heirs of glory; so it will be the means of the condemnation of them that reject it. Such is the importance of the revelation of God, that it cannot be heard in vain.

Let us then ask ourselves, To what purpose is it that we have the holy scriptures in our hands, and the ordinances of the house of God to resort to, whereby *the word of the truth of the gospel is come unto us*? Since the consequences of having these privileges are so important, it becomes us seriously to examine, whether we believe *the word of truth* or not; whether we are

<sup>43</sup> Mark xvi. 15.

<sup>44</sup> John iii. 16.

<sup>45</sup> John xii. 48.

*the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*, or not. It is the manifest will of God, by sending to us His holy word, that we should become His children by believing it. Has the end been answered for which the blessing has been vouchsafed to us? Let it be our prayer that the Spirit of God may apply His word to our hearts, that our wills may be subjected to His will, that we may be happy in the knowledge and love of God, that we may be the children of *the Father of lights* here on earth, and may hereafter receive the inheritance which is reserved for the children of God in heaven. The apostle states,

*Thirdly*, The object proposed by God in sending the word of His truth to mankind, and admitting those who truly believe it into the number of His children; and that is, *That we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures*. In this expression the apostle refers to the ordinances of the Levitical law, by which the first of the ripe fruits of the land were every year to be offered up to God; and the first born of the sons of the Israelites were given to Him, to be devoted to His service; instead of whom the Levites were considered to be in a peculiar manner devoted to Him. The setting apart of the Levites to the service of God may illustrate the apostle's meaning. It is much the same as the description given by St. Peter of believers in Christ. *Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy*

*nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.*<sup>46</sup> The children of God are, with respect to the people of the world, a kind of *first fruits of His creatures*, who hath called them by His grace to the knowledge of Himself. They are devoted to His service, concerned for and engaged in the promotion of His glory; while the people of the world are unconcerned about the honour of God, careless about rendering Him the fealty and obedience which is due from His rational creatures, and indifferent about the diffusion of the knowledge and love of His name in the world.

The apostle proceeds to show in what manner Christians are to conduct themselves as the *redeemed from among men, the first fruits unto God, and to the Lamb.*<sup>47</sup> *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.* We are to be *swift to hear the word of truth*, that we may be made acquainted with it, and live in obedience to it. Those who *turn away their ears from hearing the truth*,<sup>48</sup> cannot be the children of God. Yet, what numbers are there who refuse to hear the word of God, who despise the means of grace. If we are the children of God, we shall not forsake the assembling of ourselves together in His house of prayer, to hear His holy

<sup>46</sup> 1 Peter ii. 9.    <sup>47</sup> Revelation xiv. 4.    <sup>48</sup> 2 Timothy iv. 4.

word; but shall be anxious so to hear, that our souls may live. We shall desire to receive the instruction of heavenly wisdom, that we may grow thereby; that we may be benefited, and God may be glorified. We shall seek grace from God to enable us to treasure up His word in our hearts, for our edification and admonition and consolation; that we may be conformed to His will in all things, and be made partakers of His great salvation.

Those who are *swift to hear* are to be *slow to speak*, that is, in cavilling, or objecting to the word of God. We find that those who heard our Lord Jesus Christ, were continually finding fault with His instructions; whatever He said, they were always ready to raise some objection against His doctrine. The hearers of the gospel of Christ are to be *slow to speak*. They are to meditate upon the word of God, to examine what they hear by the unerring record of Divine truth, as the Bereans are commended for doing; of whom it is said, *that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so; and therefore many of them believed.*<sup>49</sup> The hearers of the word of God are also to watch over their words as well as their conduct, to *bridle their tongues*, and *not to speak evil one of another*, as our apostle exhorts;

<sup>49</sup> Acts xvii. 11, 12.

<sup>50</sup> 1 Timothy i. 7.



but to be careful on all occasions *what they say*, and *whereof they affirm*.<sup>50</sup>

They are likewise to be *slow to wrath*; to beware of being angry with the word which they hear, or of taking offence at it, as the hearers of Christ did. They were offended with Him. To beware also of being angry that others do not receive the word of God into their hearts; that some around them are *forgetful hearers* and not *doers of the word*. They are to be *slow to wrath*, because *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. The righteous cause of God is not to be promoted by human wrath being enlisted under its banner. If we are indeed grieved at the hardness of the hearts of any persons, we should rather express our grief in prayer for them, than by indignation. Our prayers will do them good, and will certainly bring a blessing upon ourselves, while our wrath will do them no good, but ourselves harm.

The apostle next informs us in what spirit we should hear the word of God. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness*. A polluted mind will never entertain the word of God. All impurity is so abhorrent from the Divine nature, that the Spirit of God cannot dwell where filthy thoughts are indulged in the mind, or filthy practices allowed in the conduct. Where faith in Christ exists, it purifies the heart and the life. The hearer of the word of God is also to put away *all superfluity*

*of naughtiness*, or all that wickedness with which the world abounds and overflows. He is not to think lightly of sin because it is so common, or because multitudes of people are living in ungodly practices. The overflowings of ungodliness, and the multitude of the ungodly, should rather excite in him a spirit of watchfulness and prayer, that he may not be led away by the evil examples around him, to do that which is displeasing to the Lord, who is *of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity*.<sup>51</sup> This precept also implies, that those who attend the house of God should come before Him with deep self-abasement, confessing their sins, and humbly imploring His pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, that they may be pleasing to Him; and thus may be prepared to hear what He shall say to them in His holy word.

The apostle goes on to exhort his Christian brethren, to *receive with meekness the engrafted word, which, he says, is able to save your souls*. We are to consider that it is the gospel of our salvation which demands our attention, and therefore it should be heard *with meekness* and humility. And that the word of God must be *engrafted* or implanted in us, must take root in our hearts, and become a living principle within us, in consequence of which we shall be *fruitful in every good word and work*.<sup>52</sup> It is thus that the word of God must operate in us, in order to the salvation of our

souls. We must be influenced by the Spirit of God, to be enabled to receive the word of God in this manner. It is by His grace that the incorruptible seed of the word of God takes root in the heart. He breaks up the fallow ground, He produces conviction of sin in the mind, which humbles the sinner at His feet, and leads him to value the word of God, so as to receive it with meekness and humility. By His grace the careless hearer is no longer indifferent to the things which concern the salvation of his soul, but hears the word of God with an earnest desire to be made acquainted with the things which belong to His everlasting peace. By His grace the temporary hearer, who was carried away by his feelings, becomes steady and serious and earnest that the word of God may abide in his heart and not be unfruitful. By His grace the worldly-minded hearer is led to dismiss the cares of this world from his mind, that he may direct his attention to that which is beyond it, to the world to come; and instead of seeking his portion in this life, to desire earnestly that which is better than any thing which this world can give, *to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*<sup>53</sup>

Is it our prayer, when we hear the word of God, that the Spirit of God would, by His grace, enable us to receive it with meekness and hu-

<sup>51</sup> Habakkuk i. 13.    <sup>52</sup> Colossians i. 10.    <sup>53</sup> Matthew vi. 33.

mility; and so apply it to our hearts and consciences, that it may be engrafted in us, that it may take root in our hearts, and bring forth fruit in our lives, to the praise and glory of His holy name; that we may renounce *all the superfluity of naughtiness* and wickedness, every thing that God has forbidden in His holy word, and may *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*;<sup>54</sup> as becometh His believing people? It is important that we should ascertain for ourselves, whether we have been really begotten of God *with the word of truth*, so as to be truly the children of *the Father of lights*. Has His word a place in our hearts? Have we received it with pure affection? Does it powerfully operate in us as a living principle, so that we are influenced by it to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*, all the sinful desires of the flesh, *and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*?<sup>55</sup> If this be truly the case, if we have not only a name to live as Christians, but if we do, in reality, live *the life which we live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us*;<sup>56</sup> and are enabled to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*;<sup>55</sup> let us remember that we are indebted to the goodness of God for it, and not to any superiority in ourselves over others. *It is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do*<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Luke i. 6.    <sup>55</sup> Titus ii. 12, 10.    <sup>56</sup> Galatians ii. 20.

that which is well pleasing in His sight; it is not by our own might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord that we are enabled to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. What humility, then, ought to fill our hearts, and to be displayed in our conduct, to the praise of the glory of His grace, who, *of His own will*, hath extended His mercy and compassion to us; who has begotten us *by the word of truth*, and adopted us into His family, that we might live as His children, in obedience to His holy will and commandments in this life, and may partake hereafter of *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away*, which is reserved in heaven<sup>58</sup> for the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,<sup>59</sup> when they have done with all things here below. But are we indeed *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus?*<sup>60</sup> If so, it will be our prayer and desire and endeavour, day by day, that we may exhibit the likeness of our Father in all our conduct, that we may be conformed to the image of His only begotten Son, that the mind and will of God, as it is revealed in His holy word, may be accomplished in us, and exemplified by us. Has *the word of truth* been the instrument of our regeneration, the means by which it was effected? If so, we shall prize that word for the sake of its Author, and on account of the blessing we have

57 Phil. ii. 13. 58 1 Peter i. 4. 59 Rom. viii. 17. 60 Gal. iii. 26.

received by its instrumentality. We shall *search the scriptures*, with prayer for Divine teaching, that we may receive the instruction of heavenly wisdom contained in it. We shall receive its doctrines with meekness and humility of mind; we shall *be swift to hear* it, and seek to have it engrafted or implanted in our hearts, that it may take root there, and spring up, and produce *the peaceable fruits of righteousness* to the glory and praise of God. Since it is the design of God that those who are begotten by Him *with the word of truth*, according to *His own will*, should be a kind of *first fruits of His creatures*; we shall be desirous of being devoted to His service, in heart and lip and life; and of endeavouring to promote His glory in the world; that thus we may give evidence that we are the children of the Father of lights, by letting our *light so shine before men*, that they, seeing our *good works*, may glorify His holy name. May we be enabled thus to manifest that we have not received *the grace of God in vain*; but that the word which we hear does profit us, being mixed with faith in our hearts, and with the fruits of righteousness in our lives; and may we look beyond this perishing world to the mansions of our Father's house, and the *crown of glory that fadeth not away*, which is reserved for the children of God in His eternal kingdom and glory.



