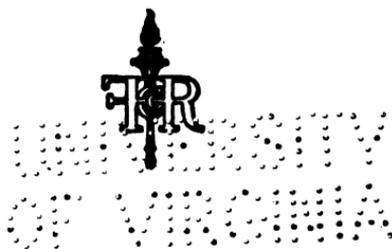


Sermons

Given By
Rev. G. B. STRICKLER, D. D.
Richmond, Va.



NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO
Fleming H. Revell Company
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

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Preface

THE sermons contained in this little volume are published in response to the request of a number of Christian friends. They were prepared originally, almost all of them, for the congregations of Tinkling Spring, Augusta County, Va., and of the Central Church, Atlanta, Ga., whom the author had the privilege and honour of serving for a number of years, and are here reproduced substantially as at first delivered. They thus pleasantly recall the happy days spent in those important churches.

No claim is made to originality in matter or treatment. It is hoped, however, that the discussion of the familiar, but important, doctrines which they contain, may, in some measure, secure the ends for which their publication is desired.

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I

THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE SCRIPTURES

“ 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.”—2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

THE fundamental question in Christianity is the origin of the Scriptures. That question is fundamental because the answer we must give to almost all other religious questions is determined by the answer we must give to it. What we are to think about God and His attributes ; law and its penalties ; sin and its consequences ; Christ and His great salvation ; the Spirit and His offices ; the Church and its ordinances ; life and its duties ; death and its issues ; eternity and its rewards for the righteous and its retributions for the wicked ;—what we are to think about these and almost all other religious subjects is determined by the conclusion at which we arrive as to the source whence the Scriptures have come. If they were written by men in the exercise of their unaided powers, then their contents are merely human speculations, having no authority except what human reason can confer.

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But if in all their parts ; in the Old Testament as well as in the New ; in the poetry as well as in the prose ; in the historical parts as well as in the doctrinal and devotional parts, they were written by holy men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, then their contents come to us with an authority from which there is no appeal, and that demands immediate submission and obedience.

But how may we know that they were thus written ? How may we be so well assured of the fact that we may rest the whole weight of our immortal interests upon them without any misgivings that our hopes shall at last "go up as dust" ?

It is not the object of the remarks now to be made to show how the learned may do this ; those who have access to all the evidences internal and external bearing upon the subject. That, if done, would meet the wants of only a few ; for the means by which the learned here satisfy themselves are not within the reach of the great majority of men, nor could they be brought within their reach. And if they could be brought within their reach, necessary absorption in the secular pursuits of life would prevent them from giving them adequate consideration. Besides, many of them would not be able to follow the long and intricate arguments through their numerous and complicated windings to their final conclusions. If, therefore, there were no means of arriving at

satisfactory results here except those of which the learned make use, the Scriptures would come to the great mass of men without satisfactory credentials ; and, therefore, if they received them at all, they would be obliged to receive them, not on the authority of God, but on the testimony of men ; and, consequently, their faith would stand "in the wisdom of men" instead of "in the power of God." It is not, therefore, the object of this discourse to show how learned men may here come to satisfactory conclusions, but how it may be done by the ordinary reader of the book.

That there is some way by which even he may do it, is plain, if the book is what it claims to be, for when it comes to men, the very first time it comes to them, it demands immediate acceptance and immediate compliance with its requirements, and especially with its great requirements, repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not announce these great requirements and then give months and years for inquiry whence the requirements have come, and with what authority they are invested, but it demands immediate obedience and solemnly warns against the dangers of the briefest delay. Now, if such a demand as that be reasonable ; if it be righteous ; if it be from God, there must be some way of ascertaining the divine origin of the book different from that of which the learned make use. It is plain that it must somehow carry its divine

credentials on its very face ; that in some way it must be its own sufficient witness ; that it must in some manner so attest itself that no other attestation is necessary.

That it is possible for a book to do this, every candid person must admit. God has so made the world that it is manifest that it is from Him. "The heavens declare His glory," so declare it that anybody may see it. "The firmament showeth His handiwork," so showeth it that anybody may behold it. "Day unto day uttereth speech," speech of Him ; speech that anybody may hear ; "night unto night showeth knowledge," knowledge of Him ; knowledge that anybody may acquire. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood from the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead," so that if men do not see them in the works of His hands, they are declared to be "without excuse." But if God can so make a material world that all men shall see it to be from Him, can He not, if He chooses, so make a book that all men shall with equal clearness see that it is from Him also? If He can make matter and mould it into organisms and into worlds and organize them into a system so vast and complicated, and yet at the same time so perfect and beautiful that all are obliged to see that He is its author, can He not, if He will, so make a book through the inspiration of

His Spirit in men, that its truths, its principles, its revelations, its contents of every sort shall be of such a character that they shall be obliged to see that it has come from the same divine source? That this is possible, no one can deny. Now what is thus possible, I shall endeavour to show is a fact in the case of the Scriptures. I shall endeavour to make plain that the contents of the book are of such a character that they cannot be satisfactorily accounted for on any other supposition except that the book is what it claims to be, a divine and inspired revelation from God.

Here a number of arguments might be presented, but the narrow limits of a single discourse restrict me to only a few.

1. One evidence of the divine origin of the book is found in what it says about God. As has already been intimated, all nations have believed in the existence of God, and they have ascribed to Him certain attributes, as knowledge and wisdom and power, and some kind of moral character, but no one of them, ignorant of the Bible, has ever ascribed to Him a perfect moral character. They have conceived of Him as being in character very much like themselves, and so as a man infinitely enlarged, His vices thus enlarged as well as His virtues. To see that this is true, it is only necessary to recall the character that was ascribed to Jupiter. They not only did

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not ascribe a perfect moral character to God, but they did not conceive of Him as being the Creator of the world. They laid it down as an axiom that "out of nothing, nothing is made," and, therefore, they held that even an infinite being could not work without something to work on, and hence held that matter was eternal as well as God, and that He was Creator only in the sense that He had given matter the different forms in which it is now seen. Nor did they conceive that God exercised over the world an infinitely wise and benevolent providence and that He had provided a way by which men might attain to an immortality of holiness and happiness. An immortality of some kind of happiness, they seem to have had some conception of, but not of an immortality of holiness. Such were some of the views entertained of God by the best pagan nations, as is known by those informed on the subject.

But now what are the views of the authors of these pages? They say, in substance, that "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." They ascribe to Him every perfection, and every perfection in infinite degree. They say He created the heavens and the earth, and that "the things which are seen were not made of the things which do appear"; that He exercises an infinitely wise and benevolent provi-

dence over men, and that He has provided a wonderful way by which they may attain to glory and honour and immortality. Whence did they get such views of Him? From the Egyptians? They did not have them. From the Greeks or Romans? They did not have them. From any other pagan people? They did not have them. Whence, then, did they get them? The authors of the Scriptures give a very satisfactory account of their origin. They do not claim to be the authors of them, but to have received them by divine revelation. Is there any other account of their origin so satisfactory as this? Is there any other account that so fully commends itself to human reason?

But further: the authors of the Scriptures not only give us views of God to which even the greatest pagan philosophers never attained, as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Seneca, and they not only put Him in relations to men in which it seems never to have occurred to those great philosophers to place Him, but they go far beyond that, and represent Him in those infinitely important relations as dealing with men; as speaking to them on the most important subjects and as acting in reference to them in the most important matters. Now, if they were inventing what they thus said, it would have been safe enough for them simply to have said that He spoke to men and that He acted in reference

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to them. They, however, did not stop there; but they went far beyond that, and undertake to tell us what He said and what He did. They fill almost whole books with what He is alleged to have said on a number of the most important subjects and with accounts of acts He is asserted to have performed in reference to matters the most important that have ever marked the history of the universe. If they were inventing in all this, what an imminent risk did they thus run of ascribing to Him some word or some act of which it would afterwards be clearly seen by all intelligent people such a being as they declared Him to be could not have been the author! Can mere men, with no more literary training than they had received, and with no more experience in composition than they enjoyed, invent so successfully as to be able to write whole books of instructions on infinitely important subjects so worthy of a being of infinite knowledge and wisdom and righteousness and goodness, that no one should be able to detect the attempted deception, and could they invent in like manner whole books of acts He is said to have performed in reference to individuals, and nations, and the whole human race, and the entire universe, so worthy of His infinite majesty and glory that no one could perceive the fraud that they were endeavouring to perpetrate? Can mere men successfully invent after that fashion? It is said to

be a very difficult thing in fiction to invent a great character and place him in all the different periods and relations of life and represent him in those different periods and relations as constantly speaking and acting without ascribing to him some word or act inconsistent with the character given him. It is said to be a triumph of genius, and no doubt it is. But here we have some forty different authors, conceiving an infinitely great character, and putting that infinitely great character in the infinitely important relations to men of Creator and Preserver and Redeemer, and as in those infinitely important relations saying and doing practically all that is contained in the Scriptures, and yet no one can successfully prove that they ever ascribe to Him a word or an act not in perfect harmony with the infinite excellences He is said to possess! How is such a fact as that to be accounted for? The explanation they give is satisfactory enough. They say they did not invent what they write, but were only recording a divine revelation. Is any other explanation so satisfactory as that? Is any other explanation half so satisfactory as that? Is any other explanation satisfactory at all?

2. Another evidence of the divine origin of the Scriptures is found in the moral law which they contain. They tell us that that law was given from Mount Sinai, out of the midst of clouds and darkness and thunders and lightnings

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and earthquakes. It is very brief; so brief that in the original it is called the ten words; so brief, indeed, that it may easily be committed to memory by small children. Yet, if we interpret it as we are taught to do by our Saviour in His Sermon on the Mount, we shall find that in principle it requires every duty we are under any obligation to perform and in principle forbids every sin we are in danger of committing. It covers the whole vast area of human obligation. There is nothing in it that ought to be out of it; nothing out of it that ought to be in it. "The law of the Lord is perfect." Whence must such a law as this have come? Men have been making laws ever since the world began, and succeeding generations have had the aid of all the knowledge and experience of preceding generations; and yet no legislative body has ever yet assembled that could make a perfect code of laws for a single nation, or city, or village. The reason such bodies find it necessary to meet so frequently is that their previous legal enactments have been found so imperfect and so inadequate for the important purposes for which they were intended. But here we have a law intended for the government of the whole human race, not only as to its public acts, but as to all its thoughts and feelings, and the experience of thousands of years shows that it is so perfect for even so vast and difficult a task as that, that if it

were in all respects perfectly obeyed, the race would be a perfect race and the world a perfect world. Is it possible that such a law as this could have come from any other source than that from which it claims to have come?

3. Still another evidence of the divine origin of the Scriptures is found in the unity of their teaching. They were written by about forty different authors at different times, in different places, under different influences, with different qualifications, for different purposes and primarily for different readers, and on the most difficult subjects the human mind has ever undertaken to treat, on God, on law, on sin, on salvation, on the future state, on the destiny of the righteous and the wicked. Yet they agree in what they teach. They say the same things on all these great subjects, the only instance of such unity of teaching in all literature. Take sixty-six other books as old as those constituting the Scriptures, on any subject whatever, and what unity of teaching is there in them? Take this number of books, half as old, on any subject whatever, on philosophy, on science, on art or religion, and is such unity of teaching found in them? Take an equal number of books at the present day on any important subject and do the authors agree in all their teachings as the authors of the Scriptures do? How, then, is this unity of teaching to be accounted for? Is there

any way to account for it satisfactorily except that way the Scriptures themselves present? Must not the unity of the book be traced back to the unity of that divine intelligence out of which the book has come?

4. A further evidence of the divine origin of the book is found in its fulfilled prophecies. It contains many prophecies in regard to the future; prophecies made, many of them, long before the events to which they refer; prophecies in regard to individuals, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Christ; prophecies in regard to cities, as Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, Sidon, Jerusalem; prophecies in regard to countries, as Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Palestine; and it can be proved by secular history that all these prophecies have been fulfilled to the full extent that up to the present time their fulfillment is called for. Whence these prophecies? Could mere men, in the exercise of their own unaided powers, so correctly forecast the future as accurately to predict events hundreds of years off? Is there any way to account for these prophecies and their fulfillment except that which the Scriptures themselves furnish? Could these prophecies have originated in any other mind than that which "sees the end from the beginning"?

5. A still further evidence that the Scriptures are from God is seen in what they say in regard

to the Lord Jesus Christ. They ascribe to Him a wonderful Personality. They say that the divine nature was united in Him to a human nature in such a way that we have a Being so wonderful that He is at the same moment both divine and human ; both infinite and finite ; both God and man ; both creator and creature ; both immortal and mortal ; both incapable of death and capable of the death of the cross. Such is the wonderful Personality they ascribe to Him. Does that sound like human invention ? They, however, not only ascribe to Him this wonderful Personality, but they put Him in all the different periods of life, in infancy, in childhood, in youth, in mature manhood, and they put Him in all the different relations of life ; in the relation of a child in the family ; of a citizen in the community ; of a member in the church ; of a teacher in the church, and in all these different periods and relations in life they represent Him as constantly speaking and acting ; and yet, although they had little knowledge of literature and little experience and skill in composition, and although each described Him in his own way, they all succeed in so describing Him in a multitude of details that we ourselves see Him to have been "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," a perfect man. If they were inventing, how is their successful invention to be accounted for ? They went further ; they say that when He

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attained about thirty years of age, He stepped forth out of the seclusion in which He had previously lived and announced Himself as the long predicted and long expected Messiah of the Jews, the Saviour of the world, and they then tell us how He undertook to execute His offices as Saviour. They not only tell us that He undertook to be a prophet, but they undertake to tell us in page after page what He said. Did they invent what they ascribe to Him? Did they invent the Sermon on the Mount? Did they invent all the parables He is said to have spoken? Did they invent all those gracious words that are said to have proceeded forth from His lips and that have been the study and the wonder and the admiration of the world ever since and that have heights and depths and lengths and breadths of meaning that no intelligent person feels that he has ever yet been able perfectly to explore? If so, then it was they "who spake as never man spake," and not God manifest in the flesh. It may be added that although they ascribe so much teaching to Him as is contained in the four Gospels, it cannot be shown that in a single instance they ascribe to Him any teaching not worthy of Him as the divine source and teacher of all truth. Can it be believed that such men as were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John could invent at that rate? They tell us, however, not only how He under-

took to be a prophet, but also how He undertook to be a priest, and what plan of salvation He made known. There is time to say here only that they represent Him as making known a salvation, which, while it saves man perfectly and gloriously, at the same time guards and secures every interest of law and justice and good government and glorifies every attribute of God's nature. At the same time that it delivers man from all the dreadful consequences of his sin and from sin itself, it rebukes sin, and intimidates transgressors, and upholds the law and vindicates justice and grounds the government of the universe on a firmer basis than ever before. Was such a scheme of salvation as that the fabrication of unprincipled and wicked impostors?

But further: they tell us how He undertook to be a king. They tell us what kind of king He undertook to be; what kind of kingdom He undertook to establish; what were its laws, and objects and modes of administration, and that kingdom we see to be in all respects worthy of Him who is said to have founded it and who presides over it. But could the authors of the New Testament have invented such a kingdom as that? Could they have invented its laws, and could they have invented that administration of those laws of which the New Testament gives us the account, applying them to multitudes of individuals in many different circum-

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stances, and applying them, not only to their characters and lives, but to their very thoughts and feelings, without in a single instance making a slip or a trip? Is all this within the powers of unaided men? But by so much as it is not, by so much we have evidence in such considerations that the book has had that divine origin which it claims.

It has been asserted, indeed, that Christ was merely the invention of the authors of the New Testament. But an inventor must always be equal to his invention. As some one has suggested, in substance, before a man can write the works of an Aristotle, he must first be an Aristotle; before he can write the plays of Shakespeare, he must first be a Shakespeare; before he can carve the statues of a Phidias, he must first be a Phidias; before he can glorify the canvas with the creations of the genius of an Apelles, he must first be an Apelles, and so before he can create such a character as Christ and invent and put into His mouth such discourses as are here ascribed to Him, he must first be a Christ. If, therefore, men could get the Christ of the Scriptures off their hands by pronouncing Him an invention, they would only thereby get a number of other Christs equal to Him on their hands, and thus their last state would be worse than their first.

6. I shall take time to mention only one

other evidence of the divine origin of the Scriptures. It is found in the fact that the book does what in this world it undertakes to do. It undertakes to deliver us from the dominion of sin. It does not, as I understand it, undertake to make us perfectly holy in this life, but it does undertake to deliver us from the dominion of sin, and thousands have testified that it did that for them. It undertakes to make us new creatures in Christ Jesus, so that "old things pass away," the old desires, the old passions, the old appetites, the old character, and the old life, "and all things become new," the desires new, the aspirations new, the character new, the life new, in an important sense, the very nature new, and thousands have testified that it did that for them. It undertakes to purify the affections and to enable the believer to lift them up and fix them supremely on God and sincerely to say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none on earth I desire beside Thee," and thousands have testified that it did that for them. It undertakes finally to give the victory over "the last enemy which is death"; to enable the believer to exclaim, "O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory?" and thousands in the honest hour of death have testified that it did that for them. Thus by the testimony of thousands and tens of thousands, whose testimony nobody has any

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right to call in question, it is proved that the word of God does in this world what it undertakes to do. But if it does here what it undertakes to do; if it delivers from the dominion of sin; if it makes men new creatures in Christ Jesus and gives them the victory over the last enemy, of course it can do in the world to come all it undertakes to do there; and if it can thus do what it undertakes to do, as innumerable multitudes have testified from their own experience it has done in their own cases, of course it is no human invention, but is what it declares itself to be, else it could not achieve such results.

By such arguments as these, found in the book itself, may it be proved to be the word of God, "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work."

II

FAITH

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.”—
HEB. xi. 6.

EVERY intelligent reader of the Scriptures has observed how much they have to say about faith; how prominent a place they give it amongst the other graces of the spirit. They say that we are united to Christ by faith; that we are justified by faith; that we live by faith; walk by faith; overcome the world by faith; are sanctified by faith; in short, are saved by faith. They thus give to faith a prominence and ascribe to it an efficiency such as are asserted of no other grace in the long catalogue of the graces. As grand summaries of their teachings on this subject, they say “without faith it is impossible to please Him;” “according to your faith be it unto you;” “he that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

There are many persons, however, who do not understand why it is that they have thus so much to say about this grace; why they give it so prominent a place in the plan of salvation and ascribe to it so much importance and power.

They think that there is something strange about it; something arbitrary; something that needs explanation; something that very much needs explanation; something, indeed, that is derogatory to religion in the view of the intelligent; for, as they suppose, the faith that is thus so much insisted on is, to some extent at least, a blind faith; an unintelligent faith; an unreasoning and so an unreasonable faith, and hence a faith that inevitably brings about a conflict between itself and reason, and thus shuts up the intelligent into the dilemma of choosing in religion whether they will be controlled by knowledge or by ignorance; by intelligence or by mere authority or superstition. There cannot be any doubt that there are many persons who imagine that this is the issue with which they are confronted by what is ordinarily taught concerning this grace. Some time ago a prominent lawyer made this statement in a religious meeting: "A brother lawyer said to me recently, 'I wish I could believe what you Christians believe. Tell me how I may do it.' I answered him, you must just *swallow it down!*" Some such notion many have as to the way in which the Christian religion is to be received, and hence much of the prejudice there is against it.

The fact is, however, that there is nothing unreasonable in what the Scriptures teach about faith, and no conflict whatever is brought about

between faith and reason. We are not required in the Scriptures to believe anything that is contrary to reason. Reason is a revelation from God just as certainly as the Scriptures are ; and since both these revelations come from the same divine source, they must be in harmony the one with the other, and, therefore, reason, rightly used, can never come into conflict with the Scriptures rightly interpreted ; nor can the Scriptures, rightly interpreted, ever come into conflict with reason rightly used.

Not only is it true, that we are not in the Scriptures required to believe anything that is contrary to reason, but it is also true that we are not required to believe anything without reason,—without sufficient reason. We are required, indeed, to believe a number of things that are above reason ; that is, above the comprehension of our feeble mental powers, as, for instance, the doctrine of an absolute creation, and the doctrine of the Trinity ; but while we are thus required to believe what is above reason, we are not required to believe anything that is contrary to reason ; nor are we required to believe anything without reason ; without the best reason that could possibly be given for believing anything. That reason is furnished us in conclusive evidence that the Scriptures are an inspired revelation from God. In the history of the book as it may be traced back to its origin in inspired prophets and

apostles ; “ in the heavenliness of their matter ; ” “ in the majesty of their style ; ” “ in the scope of the whole, which is to give glory to God ; ” in the prophecies which they contain, all of which have been fulfilled, in so far as up to the present time their fulfillment is called for ; in the morality which they inculcate ; a morality so perfect that every candid person must admit that it is without defect ; in their competency to do for men in this world what, under the divine blessing, they undertake to do to deliver them from the dominion of sin ; to make them “ new creatures in Christ Jesus ” and to bestow on them many other blessings ; a competency attested by the experience and testimony of hundreds of thousands ; in these and in many other ways we are furnished with conclusive evidence that they are an inspired revelation from God, and an infallible rule of faith and practice ; and it is on that ground, and on that ground alone, that we are required to believe what they say. Is not that asking us to believe for the very best reason that could be given for believing anything, and is it possible that such a faith as that should bring about any conflict between itself and reason ? Does not reason itself demand, as clearly as it demands anything, that such a faith as that shall be exercised ? There is here, then, no conflict between faith and reason. Whole libraries, indeed, have been written about this conflict ; but the fact is, there is no such con-

flict, and never has been, and in the nature of the case cannot be. Faith and reason are in perfect harmony in the plan of salvation, faith doing only that on which reason itself insists, and reason doing only that which is entirely consistent with the demands made on faith.

But the special object of this discourse is to explain why it is that the Scriptures have so much to say about faith; why they make it more prominent than any other grace and attribute to it so much power; why they say, "without faith it is impossible to please Him;" "according to your faith be it unto you;" "he that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned;" in short, why they give faith the first place in the scheme of salvation. And I remark

1. That faith, in the broadest sense of the word, and as a great controlling principle of human conduct, has the first place, not only in the plan of salvation, but the first place everywhere else.

It has the first place in the family. Suppose the members of a family had no faith in one another; the husband no faith in the wife; the wife no faith in the husband; the parents no faith in the children; the children no faith in the parents; with what comfort, with advantage of any sort could the family relation then subsist? How could there be conjugal affection, and parental

affection, and filial affection, and without such affection, how could there be that constant and faithful and affectionate discharge of conjugal and parental and filial duties on which the welfare of the family is so dependent? If the husband had no faith in his wife, how could he love her, even as Christ loves the Church, as he is expressly required to do? If the wife had no faith in her husband, how could she reverence him and be in subjection to him in the Lord, as is distinctly enjoined? If the parents had no faith in one another, how could they coöperate together in training up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? And if the children had no faith in their parents, how could they with any benefit receive such training at their hands? If the members of a family thus had no faith in one another, how could they cooperate together for the accomplishment of any of the great ends for which the relation was constituted? How could the relation for any useful purpose subsist? Thus faith, in the broadest sense of the word and as a great controlling principle of human conduct, has just as large a place in the family as it has in the plan of salvation, and as there can be no religion without faith so it is equally certain that there can be no family without faith.

Faith has a large place, however, not only in the family, but also in the business world. Sup-

pose that business men had no faith in one another ; merchants no faith in merchants ; the merchants of the South no faith in the merchants of the North ; the merchants of the North no faith in the merchants of the South ; buyers no faith in sellers ; sellers no faith in buyers ; employers no faith in employees ; employees no faith in employers ; lawyers no faith in clients ; clients no faith in lawyers ; physicians no faith in patients ; patients no faith in physicians ; teachers no faith in pupils ; pupils no faith in teachers ; man no faith in man, how much business could then be transacted ? How many fortunes could then be made ? How many railroads could then be constructed ? How many cities could then be built ? How much secular good could then be acquired and enjoyed ? What progress could then be made in the best kinds of civilization ? In such circumstances, how could there be any civilization of any kind whatever ? Destroy the faith of man in man, and then all those mighty energies of the human race that are now so illustrating the annals of time with their wonderful achievements, would be as instantaneously and completely paralyzed as they will be in that day when the trumpet of God shall suddenly sound and the voice of the Son of God shall be heard summoning the race to the awful solemnities of the final judgment. Faith thus has as prominent a place in the business world as it has in

religion, and as there can be no religion without faith, so it is equally certain that there can be no business without faith. Faith is just as necessary for the one as for the other.

But what is thus true in the business world is equally true in the civil sphere. Suppose men had no faith in one another ; neighbour no faith in neighbour ; citizen no faith in citizen ; rulers no faith in the people ; the people no faith in the rulers, how could men then come together and devise those plans for the administration of the affairs of the community on which its order and welfare are so dependent ? How could governments be organized, and, if organized, how could they be successfully administered ? How could laws be enacted, and, if enacted, how could they be enforced ? How could rulers be chosen, and, if chosen, how could they successfully discharge the functions of their respective offices ? How could there be organization of any kind whatever for any purpose whatever, social, civil or religious ? Why, instead of organization, there would be nothing but strife and confusion and anarchy. Every man would be an Ishmaelite, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. Society for any valuable purpose could not exist. Faith is thus as necessary for all civil institutions as it is for the religion of the Scriptures. It has as conspicuous a place in one as in the other.

The same is true as to what may be called the more purely intellectual spheres of life. Suppose we had no faith in scientists, how much science could we learn? No faith in philosophers, how much philosophy could we learn? No faith in historians, how much history could we learn? No faith in linguists, how much of the dead languages of the world could we learn? No faith in teachers of any kind, how much benefit could we then derive from their instruction? The broad assertion may here safely be made that all our knowledge of this kind rests at bottom on faith and on that alone. Why do we say, for instance, that we know that in times past there lived such military heroes as Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon; such historians as Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy; such poets as Homer, Milton, Shakespeare; such philosophers as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; such orators as Demosthenes and Cicero? It is because we have faith in history. Why is it that we say that we know that in the fields of space above us there are certain worlds that have certain magnitudes, and that move with certain velocities, and that perform certain revolutions? It is because we have faith in astronomy. Why is it that we say that we know that deep down in the crust of the earth there are certain rocks that belong to one age of the world's history and certain other rocks that belong to other ages of the world's history? It is because we have faith in

geology. Why is it that we say that we know that certain words are derived from certain dead languages? It is because we have faith 'in the science of etymology and philology. And so generally. It is thus plain that all our knowledge of this kind rests at last on faith, and on that exclusively. Indeed, we may go further, and say that all our knowledge of every kind rests upon that basis and upon that basis alone. On that basis rests our knowledge of the existence of an external material world. Some philosophers, as is well known, have denied the existence of such a world. Amongst other things, they have said that the only evidence we have of the existence of such a world comes through the senses—the senses of vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell—but that notoriously these senses often deceive us, and, therefore, they may be deceiving us when they seem to be giving us evidence of the existence of such a world. Why is it, then, that we say we know such a world exists? It is because we have faith in the testimony of these senses, as, indeed, they have who deny the existence of such a world, for although in theory they deny its existence, they show by their acts that they believe in its existence as much as we do. Do they not go out into it just as we do, and move up and down in it just as we do? Do they not engage in its pursuits and seek its secular good, its food and raiment and shelter just as

we do? And do they not write their books to prove there is no such world, because in fact they believe there is such a world, and that their books will go out into it, and circulate hither and thither in it, and be read by other beings like themselves? Why else should they write their books? Our knowledge of the existence of an external world, then, rests ultimately on faith and on that alone. But we may go still further and say that our knowledge of our own existence rests on the same basis. Some philosophers have denied that we have certain knowledge of anything, even of our own existence. Such an assertion, however, is manifestly absurd, for if nothing is certain, then it is plain that one thing is certain, and that is, that nothing is certain; and it is further plain that we must exist in order to be able to make the affirmation that our existence is uncertain. We know that we exist because we have faith in the testimony of our own consciousness that we exist.

We thus see that faith in the widest sense of the word and as a great controlling principle of human conduct has the first place not only in religion, but everywhere else; and that as there can be no religion without it, so there can be none of the useful relations and occupations of life without it; that it is just as necessary in the secular sphere as it is in the religious. If one, then, objects to religion because faith has so

large a place in it, he ought equally to object to all the different social and civil and business relations of life because faith has an equally large place in them. If he objects to religious knowledge because it rests on faith, he ought in like manner to object to all other kinds of knowledge, because they rest on the same foundation. How absurd it is to find fault with religion and to reject its blessings because they can be had only on the condition of faith, when, as we now see, none of the blessings of life, even secular blessings, can be secured in other way!

2. Another reason why the Scriptures give so much prominence to faith is that there is so much about religion that cannot be understood, and, therefore, cannot be received through the understanding, and hence, if received at all, must be received by faith. This, however, is no peculiarity of religion. Some seem to think it is, and object to religion on that account. The fact is, however, that it is equally true of every other subject of knowledge, even of those subjects with which we are most familiar. There is no fact with which we are more familiar than the fact of our own existence. Yet, who understands it? How do we exist? We do not understand how it is that mind and matter are so united as to constitute our persons, and how they act and react on each other as they are now doing while I am speaking and you are listening. We do not un-

derstand how it is that an impression, made on the senses, is carried within and announced to the soul in its secret abiding place and how its volitions issue forth and execute themselves through the nerves, muscles and limbs of the body. We do not understand the principle of all our activities—the principle of life. No scientist has ever discovered it in his laboratory and held it up on the point of his scalpel to the admiring gaze of his students. We do not understand how our bodies are nourished and sustained; how food is received and digested and how it is taken into the circulation of the blood and carried about over the body, and some deposited in one place to make bone, and some in another place to make nerve, and some in another place to make muscle, and some in still another place to make flesh. Some things about it we may approximately understand; but after we have gone as far as we can, there still remains a vast domain of profound mystery that utterly baffles all our attempts to explore it. There are thus mysteries in those things with which we are most familiar that are as insoluble as any connected with religion. There are many facts connected with our own being that we can no more understand than we can the facts connected with God's being. Nature is as full of mysteries as revelation. It is no peculiarity of religion, then, that it has much about it that cannot be received

through the understanding. It is equally true of every other subject of knowledge. The fact is that we do not and cannot fully understand anything. We cannot understand that fact that underlies all other facts, the fact of existence. How does anything exist? How does the simplest form of life exist? How does even matter exist? How absurd it is, then, for men to object to religion and to reject it because of the mysteries connected with it! Why, they cannot understand how it is that they can stand up on their two feet and so make use of their vocal organs as to express their objections to the mysteries of religion. That is as great a mystery as anything in religion at which their objections are aimed.

But while religion has no more mysteries connected with it than other subjects have, it has much about it that cannot be understood, and so cannot be received through the understanding, but, if received at all, must be received by faith. We cannot understand, for instance, how an infinite being exists without ever having begun to exist; how he has infinite knowledge without ever having learned; how he possesses infinite power without ever having undergone any process of growth or development; how he possesses every excellence in infinite degree underived, unacquired. We cannot understand how in the infinite amplitude of the divine nature there are

three Persons, each God, each equally God, the same in substance and equal in power and glory, and yet how after all, there are not three Gods, but only one, over all, blessed forever. We cannot understand how it is that by virtue of His omnipresence, He is in all the fullness of the attributes of His nature equally present every moment at every point in the wide extent of the universe. We cannot understand how the divine nature and the human nature are so united as to constitute the Person of the Saviour, so that He is at the same moment both divine and human; both infinite and finite, both creator and creature, both immortal and mortal; both incapable of death and yet capable of the death of the cross; both the great God, ruling over all beings and all worlds, yet once at the same time a little helpless babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the arms of His mother. We cannot understand how, by the mere word of His power, He could bring into existence this world and all the other worlds we see in the fields of space above us and how just as easily He could have repeated the wondrous achievement. We cannot understand how He so presided over the composition of the Scriptures, that, while they were written by fallible men in fallible human speech, they are at the same time the infallible word of God, able to make us wise unto salvation and to guide our feet safely along the straight and narrow path

that leads to His kingdom. These and many other things we cannot understand. If we receive them, then, we must receive them by faith; by faith in His word that is attested to us as an inspired revelation; that is, we must receive them for the best reason that can be given for receiving anything.

3. Still another reason why the Scriptures have so much to say about faith is that it is a seminal, a parental, a fountal grace; the grace out of which all other graces spring. It is sometimes asked why we give faith so much prominence; why we do not give the first place to love; that love to God that prompts us to meet all our obligations to Him; that love to our fellow men which prompts us to meet all our obligations to them; or why we do not give the first place to good works. Why do you attach more importance to creed than you do to conduct; to the theoretical than to the practical? But those who thus object thereby show that they do not understand the philosophy that underlies the teaching of the Scriptures on this subject. Faith is put first, not arbitrarily, but because from the very constitution of our being, it must come first. How do the other graces come into existence? How, for instance, does the grace of Christian love come into existence? We must first believe what the Scriptures say about God; about His infinite excellence and

glory ; about the relations in which He stands to us ; about the blessings He has bestowed upon us in the past and the still greater blessings He offers to bestow upon us in the future, and sincerely believing what they thus say, our affections begin to rise up towards Him and to fix themselves supremely on Him ; and thus the grace of Christian love comes into existence ; and it is plain that it could not come into existence in any other way. We must believe that God is a lovely being before we can fix our love upon Him. What is thus true of the way this grace comes into existence, is equally true of all the other graces. How does the grace of repentance come into existence ? We must first believe what the Scriptures say about our sins ; how many they are, and how great they are, and how inexcusable ; how offensive to God ; how heinous in themselves and how destructive of the soul, and sincerely believing all this, we begin to regret that we committed them, and to fear them, and to hate them, and to turn away from them, and to seek after that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. How do the graces of devotion and zeal come into existence ? We must first believe what the Scriptures teach about God's cause ; about its nature ; its importance, its claims, the great objects it has in view and its rewards, and sincerely believing all this, we begin to be interested in it

and to be willing to consecrate to it all we are and all we have. Faith is thus the source of all the other graces, and hence is given that prominence which the Scriptures ascribe to it, and is invested with that importance which they assign to it. Is it at all strange that it should be put first when thus from the very constitution of our minds it comes first?

4. Still another reason why so much importance is attached to faith is found in the chapter from which the text is taken. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." There is some difference of opinion as to the precise meaning of this expression,—but there can be little doubt that the meaning substantially is, faith gives substance to the things hoped for; gives them reality in the view of the mind; such reality as controls the thoughts of the mind and the feelings of the heart; and it is the conviction of the things not seen; so profound and thorough a conviction of their reality and importance that it determines the character and the life. Such is the nature and effect of faith, as illustrated in the whole of the chapter following. Faith, for instance, gives reality to the commandments of God and prompts obedience to them, therefore by faith "the elders"—the ancient servants of God—"obtained a good report;" a good report for obedience; a good report from men and from God.

Faith gives reality to the conditions on which God offers mercy to men and secures compliance with them. Therefore "by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh." Faith gives reality to the warnings of God, and prompts to the use of the means necessary to escape the dangers towards which they point. Therefore, "Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Faith gives reality to the promises of God and impels to the fulfillment of the conditions on which they are made. Therefore "by faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out unto a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Faith gives reality to the blessings involved in "the things hoped for" and inspires a willingness to do and suffer all that is necessary to secure them. Therefore by faith multitudes have endured

“cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, bonds and imprisonments; they have been stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” Thus faith gives such reality to the things hoped for and is so profound and thorough a conviction of the importance and value of the things not seen, that it prompts to a fulfillment of all the conditions on which their enjoyment depends, and for this reason, as well as for others, is given that conspicuous place in the plan of salvation which the Scriptures assign it.

5. There is time to mention only one more reason why so much is made of faith. It is the grace by which Christ is received as a Saviour. In order that we may be saved a number of things must be done for us that we cannot do for ourselves. Our sins must be pardoned. We cannot do that for ourselves. Our natures must be renewed. We cannot do that for ourselves. After we have been introduced into the Christian life, our feet must be kept from falling and our souls must be kept from death, and at last we must have administered unto us an entrance into God's everlasting kingdom. None of these things can we do for ourselves. If done at all, they must be done for us by our Saviour. But He will do them for us only when we receive

Him as our Saviour, and we can receive Him only by faith ; faith in Himself and in the offers of Himself He makes to us.

We thus see some of the reasons why the Scriptures have so much to say about this grace ; why they attach to it so much importance ; why they ascribe to it so much power ; why they say " without faith it is impossible to please Him " ; " he that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." We see that there is nothing strange about it ; nothing arbitrary ; nothing that justifies the objections that are made against religion. On the contrary, we see that the prominence given to faith in religion results from the very constitution of our being, as well as from the nature of the scheme of salvation.

The great practical question, then, for us all is, Have we faith? Have we faith in the Scriptures? Have we that true faith that responds to all their teachings according to their character? Do we so believe the warnings that we regard them ; the threatenings that we tremble at them ; the promises that we rely on them ; the commandments that we obey them ; all the great lessons inculcated that we yield ourselves up to their controlling and sanctifying power? Especially do we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Let us never forget that He, who is the King of that kingdom into which we all hope at last to enter ; who carries its keys at His girdle ; who

opens its doors and no man can shut them ; who shuts its doors and no man can open them ; let us never forget that He has said (and we now see some of the sufficient reasons why He has said it), " He that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

III

RELIGION. REASONABLE

“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.”—ISA. i. 18.

IT is so far from being true, as is sometimes asserted, that religion is in any respect contrary to reason, that it invites its calmest and closest scrutiny. It not only claims to be in accord with human reason, but to be the highest product of the infinite intelligence. That is, it claims that in it the highest manifestations of the infinite wisdom are seen; that in it its most glorious achievements are witnessed. Its standing invitation to man is, come and let us reason together; reason together as to the origin of religion; as to its nature; its claims; its objects; its results. It is perfectly willing to abide by any conclusion to which the right use of reason may conduct.

It may be well, in introducing this discourse, to point out a few respects in which it does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason.

I. It does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason as to its great fundamental proposition,

that there is a God. It reveals to us a God who is a Spirit infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth, and thus presents to us for our worship and service a being who completely transcends all our powers of comprehension, for the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. Yet the doctrine is not unreasonable, for religion points to evidences of its truth in nature and in revelation so clear, so conclusive, so overwhelming, that of the millions of the human race hardly any have been able to resist it. Even in those parts of the world where this evidence exists in smallest measure ; where only that evidence is seen which the works of nature present, and where, because of ignorance and superstition and prejudice, even that evidence is seen in only the dimmest light, it is still so clear and so conclusive and so overwhelming, that no nation has ever been found that did not believe in the existence of God and that did not have some ceremonials of worship. The few individuals of our race who have rejected this evidence and denied the existence of God, have so signally failed successfully to commend their views to their fellow men that there are no speculations in which men have ever indulged that the human race has so unanimously and so emphatically repudiated. As to this fundamental proposition, then, religion does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason.

Reason says almost as clearly as the Scriptures teach, that there is a God.

Another doctrine in regard to which religion does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason (and it may be mentioned because of its practical importance), is that man has fallen from the high estate in which he was created by sinning against God and thus has become spiritually depraved. This doctrine is mortifying to human pride, and therefore many men have exerted their ability to the utmost to discredit it, but so far from showing it to be contrary to reason, one of its clearest proofs is drawn from reason, and in this way. Because God was perfect, He must have made man perfect; perfect in every respect; perfect physically; perfect intellectually and perfect spiritually. But physical perfection implies the absence of all bodily weakness and disease. Intellectual perfection implies the capacity to perceive and acquire all necessary truth. Spiritual perfection implies absolute freedom from sin and supreme devotion to truth and to duty. But while man must have been created in this condition, it is plain to reason that he is not in this condition now. So far from being physically perfect, his body is marked by many infirmities and subject to the assaults of many diseases and even of death itself. So far from being intellectually perfect, the acquisition of the most necessary truth—the truth of God's word—is a laborious

process and attended with liability to fatal mistake. So far from being spiritually perfect, he is himself conscious, when the evil principles of his nature have been aroused and brought into contact with the holy principles of God's nature, that he is, as the Apostle Paul says he is, "Enmity against God, not subject to His law, neither indeed can be." But this enmity against that which is infinitely good and holy means, and cannot but mean, that he has lapsed out of that state of perfection in which he was created and has come under the dominion of moral and spiritual evil. As to this doctrine, then, religion does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason. Nor does it as to any other doctrine it inculcates. If any man imagines that it in the slightest degree seeks to avoid any investigation to which reason may subject its doctrines, he is labouring under most groundless and mischievous misapprehension.

As religion does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason as to the doctrines which it inculcates, so it does not as to the duties which it teaches. It teaches a great number of duties, but they may all be said to be summed up in the one great duty of obeying the moral law. But to that law, man is "not subject, neither indeed can be." He is averse to it; averse to its pure spirituality; averse to the high and sacred duties which it imposes; averse to the sanctions by

which it is maintained. He rebels against it; refuses to obey it. But he thus rebels against it and refuses to obey it, not because it is contrary to reason, but solely because it is contrary to his sinful desires and appetites and passions. Reason can prove, what the Scriptures teach, that that law is holy and just and good; holy in every one of its requirements, demanding only that which is holy in itself and that tends to holiness; just in every one of its requirements, demanding only that to which God has a perfect right; good in every one of its requirements, demanding only that which is for man's highest interests here and hereafter; reason can demonstrate, what the Scriptures teach, that the law is in all these respects, perfectly holy and perfectly just and perfectly good. If men would only be all and do all that this law requires, every candid person must admit that the race would then be a perfect race and the world a perfect world. What vice or sin is there of which men would not then be divested, and what virtue or grace is there with which they would not then be invested? But if the law thus perfectly obeyed would make the race a perfect race and the world a perfect world, why should religion, in the slightest degree seek to avoid any scrutiny to which reason might subject it?

As religion does not shrink from the scrutiny of reason as to the doctrines which it teaches

and as to the duties which it imposes, so it does not as to the results which it has wrought. It does not claim, indeed, that it has done in the world all that it ought to have done. It is perfectly willing to admit that because of a lack of zeal on the part of its adherents it has not done the half that it ought to have done. At the same time, however, it claims to have done enough to demonstrate both its divine origin and its divine efficiency. When we consider from how small and unpromising a beginning it has under the present dispensation spread itself over so large a portion of the world ; when we consider that a little upper room in Jerusalem was almost large enough to contain all its adherents, while now they are numbered by millions and are found in every nation under the sun ; when we consider that its doctrines, and especially its chief doctrine, "Christ and Him crucified," were to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness ; when we consider that its original propagators were taken, almost all of them, from the humblest classes of human society, some of them from the fishing boats of the Sea of Galilee, and that they were without any of the training of the schools, and that so far from having anything to commend them to the different peoples to whom they went, were, as belonging to a proscribed race, the objects of suspicion and prejudice and enmity ; when we consider that at every step of

their progress they had to encounter ignorance and prejudice and superstition that had been growing and consolidating from the beginning of the world up to that time ; when we consider that everything was against them ; that the philosophies of the world were against them, and the learning of the world, and the religions of the world, and the governments of the world, and the power of the world in all its different forms ; when we consider thus all the obstacles that were in its way and that had to be overcome that any progress might be made, and then consider how much it has accomplished ; how many millions of the race it has transformed and ennobled and sanctified and made " meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," and how many millions more it has in process of preparation for the same glorious destiny ; when we consider how whole nations have been disenthralled from ignorance and barbarism and superstition and put in possession of the high forms of civilization which they now enjoy, and when we consider that it is now obviously gathering His resources and marshalling its forces for that grand final onset that is to result in all the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ ; when we consider all these facts that no candid person can successfully call in question, it is plain that religion not only has an efficiency for the accomplishment of good, but

that it has a divine efficiency of this sort, else it could not have accomplished these results. Why, take out of the world all the good religion has put into it; take out of the governments of the world all the good religion has put into them; out of the laws of the world all the good religion has put into them; out of the institutions of the world all the good religion has put into them; out of the literatures of the world all the good religion has put into them; out of the Christian homes of the world all the good religion has put into them and out of the characters of millions of Christian men and women in the world all the good religion has put into them; eliminate all this good; instantly blot it all completely out of existence, and what a scene of moral and spiritual ruin and desolation would then present itself to our view! But by so much as religion has thus put good into the governments and laws and institutions and literatures and Christian homes and Christian characters of the world, as every intelligent person must admit, by so much has it no occasion to seek to avoid any investigation of reason as to the results which it has accomplished.

I repeat, then, that religion does not in any respect shrink from the scrutiny of reason. Its standing challenge to the world is, "Come and let us reason together." It is perfectly willing to abide by any result to which the right use of reason may lead.

II. But in the next place, the text teaches that while religion does not shrink from, but invites the calmest and closest scrutiny of reason, this is an invitation that the great mass of men do not accept. Although, if religion be true at all, it is the most important of all truth ; although if it concerns men at all, it concerns them to an infinite degree ; although if it be worthy of their attention at all, it is worthy of the highest possible measure of it, it is nevertheless a subject that the great majority of them pass by with little consideration. This is plain from the language of the text. Would God so earnestly appeal to men to come and bring their reason to bear upon this great subject, if that were something they were already doing ? Although they possess reason, and although this is the subject which above all others demands the consideration of reason, this is the subject which more than all others they in this respect most seriously neglect. They do not bring their reason to bear on the claims of religion. It claims their supreme attention ; it claims all the affections of their hearts ; it claims the devotion of all their lives. Now how many of the unconverted have ever taken these claims, and separating themselves from their fellow men, have retired into some place of privacy and there brought their reason to bear upon them ; upon their origin, upon their nature ; upon their number ; upon their importance and

upon their obligatory force, with the sincere and honest purpose of doing in regard to them whatever their reason should require? I suppose I run no risk in saying that no one of them has ever done this ; for these claims are so reasonable and righteous that if they had done it, their reason would have compelled them to yield to them. The simple fact, then, that they have never yielded to these claims, proves that they have never given them that consideration for which the text calls and that reason demands. And, I may add, that they have thus involved themselves in great guilt. Suppose that on the morrow a pecuniary claim of some sort should be presented to you in your places of business ; a claim which, although you had never looked into it, you had reason to believe was a just claim ; a claim, indeed, whose justice was assured by the character of the person presenting it, and a claim, which, if just, you would be under obligation at once to meet ; suppose that such a claim should be presented to you, and you should refuse to consider it. Suppose it should be presented again the next day, and you should again refuse to consider it ; that it should be presented again and again, and again and again you should refuse to give it any proper consideration, what would become of your integrity ; of your standing amongst your fellow men? But God has presented to you the claims of religion ; claims

which you know you have reason to believe are righteous claims ; claims, indeed, whose righteousness is guaranteed by the character of the great Being presenting them, and claims, which, if they be righteous, you are under the highest possible obligation at once to respond to ; He has presented to you these claims again and again, and again and again you have refused to consider them ; in instances without number He has urged them upon your consideration, and in instances without number you have refused to take that account of them which they demanded. Do you not thus see that you have involved yourselves in great guilt ? Do you not see you have treated God as you would not dare to treat your fellow men ? Do you not see that you have treated God in a way in which, if you had treated your fellow men, they would condemn you, and proscribe you, and reprobate you ? And do you suppose you can treat Him in a way in which you would not dare to treat your fellow men without incurring any serious consequences ?

But as men do not bring their reason to bear on the claims of religion, so they do not bring it to bear on the teachings of religion. They do not bring it to bear, for instance, on the teachings of religion as to the pursuit of happiness. Happiness is something we all desire ; something we are all seeking after ; something we are all seeking after under the irresistible impulses of

our own natures ; something God intends we shall seek after and something He intends we shall find, if we seek after it in the direction in which He points and in the things He prescribes. But now the evidence that men do not bring their reason to bear on this teaching is found in the fact that they not only do not seek happiness in the direction in which He points and in the things which He prescribes, but they seek it in the opposite direction and in things which He forbids. Instead of seeking it in Him and in the things of His kingdom, they seek it in the world and in sin ; seek it where He assures them they cannot find it. And thus they involve themselves in great folly. Suppose you were on one of those excursions to distant countries that have now become so frequent, and that on the morrow you should be travelling along a certain road in search of a certain city of great historic interest, but that all the maps and charts and guide-books of the country should tell you that that city was not on that road ; and that many of the citizens of the country should tell you that all their lives they had lived on that road and that often they had traversed it from one end to the other, and that they knew from personal observation that that city was not on that road ; and yet that in the face of all this testimony you should go right on seeking that city by that route. Could there be folly of its kind any

greater than that? Yet it is of folly of just this kind that the unconverted are guilty in seeking after happiness. The Bible, their great guide-book, tells them that they cannot find it in the direction in which they are seeking it, and millions of God's people testify from their own painful and protracted experience that they cannot find it in that direction, and yet here they go seeking it in that direction as eagerly, as hopefully, as perseveringly as if all this testimony of God's word and God's people were not worthy of a moment's serious consideration. Could there be any plainer evidence that they have never brought their reason to bear on this teaching of the Scriptures? Would reason permit them thus to act if they would listen to her voice?

Another teaching of the Scriptures on which they do not bring their reason to bear is found in what they say as to the danger to which all the unconverted are exposed. The Scriptures labour adequately to depict this danger. They say that it is great; that it is imminent; that it is as serious as it can be. And they give the reasons why it is so. They say that behind the unconverted man is a wasted life; that within him is a ruined soul; that above him is an angry God; that before him is a judgment seat before which he has no preparation to stand; that beneath him is a lost world into which he may at

any moment hopelessly and forever plunge. But the evidence that the unconverted do not bring their reason to bear on this teaching is found in the fact that in all this danger they are almost as quiet; almost as calm; almost as contented; almost as well pleased, as if they were not in any danger at all, but in security itself!

Thus although religion does not shrink from, but invites the scrutiny of reason, this is an invitation that the great mass of men do not accept. Many of them are constantly talking about "reason," "reason," in connection with religion as something they much desire. Yet the fact is that there is no faculty of their souls of which they make so little right use in connection with religion as they do of their reason. They refuse to make that use of it which not only religion, but itself demands.

III. The text teaches that while they refuse to bring their reason to bear on this great subject, it is nevertheless something they must do if they would be saved. This also is evident from the language of the text. Would God so much insist that they shall do this, as He does in the text, if it were not necessary to their spiritual welfare? The reason why it is necessary is plain. God has endowed us with reason. He has endowed us with it that we may be controlled by it, especially in matters of importance. If He deals with us at all, therefore, He will deal with

us through our reason. He will not save us as if we were mere stocks or stones. He will not by mere power take us up out of the kingdom of darkness and carry us over and set us down in the kingdom of light ; but He will deal with us through our reason. He will bring influences to bear upon us consistent with our rational natures. He will bring the truths of His word to bear upon us ; truths that appeal to our reason ; to our consciences, to our imaginations, to our hopes and to our fears ; to every consideration by which we ought to be controlled as rational beings, and by means of these truths, under the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, He will bring about the great transition from the one kingdom over into the other. But in order that this transition may thus take place under the influence of the truth, reason must be brought to bear upon it and kept in contact with it closely enough and long enough to give it an opportunity adequately to impress it. Ask any one who has passed from the one kingdom over into the other in what circumstances the transition took place and no doubt he will answer that it was when he did what the text here insists on. Although men, then, refuse to do what the text urges, it is nevertheless something they must do if they would be saved.

IV. The text teaches what would be the result if this invitation were accepted. "Come 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." That is, if we should accept this invitation and go to Him to hear what He would have to say about this great matter, and what our reason, when brought into His presence, would have to say ; if we should go into His presence, not only to hear what He would have to say and what our reason in His presence would have to say, but to do what He would tell us to do and what our reason in His presence would tell us to do, it is certain that we would accept the great plan of salvation He has devised. He would not permit us in His presence to do any less and our reason in His presence would not permit us to do it ; and having done that, then no matter about our sins ; no matter how many they may be nor how great, though as scarlet they should instantly be white as snow ; though red like crimson they should instantly be as wool. Such would be the certain result of a sincere acceptance of this invitation. And now let me add that it greatly concerns us to accept this invitation, for our "sins are as scarlet and red like crimson." What is it that makes sins to be of this character ? One thing that makes sin as scarlet and red like crimson is sinning for a long time. But have not we sinned for a long time ? Have we not been sinning from our

earliest responsible moments up to the present time? Have we not been sinning all our lives? Have we not been sinning as long as it has been possible for us to sin? If sinning, then, for a long time makes sins as scarlet and red like crimson, are not our sins of that character? Another thing that makes sins as scarlet and red like crimson is sinning against clear light. But have not we sinned against clear light; against the clear light of reason, of conscience, of God's providence and of God's word? Did the sun ever at noonday pour down on the world a clearer light than that light against which all our lives we have been sinning? If sinning, then, against clear light makes sins as scarlet and red like crimson, must we not acknowledge our sins to be of that nature? Still another thing that makes sins as scarlet and red like crimson is sinning against great mercies. But have not we sinned against great mercies; great mercies to our world; great mercies to our country; great mercies to the particular communities in which we live; great mercies to our families; great mercies to ourselves; great temporal mercies; great spiritual mercies? Can any one of us enumerate the mercies God has bestowed upon us? Are they not like the sands upon the sea-shore for number and like the stars in the sky for multitude? If sinning, then, against great mercies can make sins as scarlet and red like

crimson, are not our sins of that kind? One more thing that makes our sins as scarlet and red like crimson is sinning against frequent and clear and solemn warning. But have not we sinned against such warning? Has not the voice of warning been ringing in our ears all our lives? Has not the voice of parental instruction warned us? Has not the voice of Sabbath-school instruction warned us? Has not the voice of God's providence and God's word warned us; and now and then has not a voice more impressive, perhaps, than even any of these, warned us, the voice that came forth out of the chamber of sickness and of death? If then such aggravations as these can make sins as scarlet and red like crimson, must we not acknowledge that our sins are of that character? It greatly concerns us, therefore, to accept the invitation of the text, and if we would only accept it and go to the Lord with the honest purpose of doing what He would tell us to do and what our reason in His presence would tell us to do, it is certain we would accept the Saviour, and then though our sins be as scarlet they should in a moment become white as snow and though they be red like crimson they should in a moment be as wool.

V. But, in the last place, if we refuse to accept this invitation, it must be fatal to us. It is fatal everywhere to disregard reason. Let a man disregard reason as to the preservation of his health.

Let him eat deadly poisons instead of wholesome food, and will it not be fatal to him? Let him disregard reason as to the promotion of his secular interests. Let him disregard all the suggestions of prudence and all the requirements of safety, and will it not be fatal to him? Let him disregard reason as to the preservation of his character. Let him cast away all the safeguards of virtue and religion, and will it not be fatal to him? Is there anything that men know better than they know this, that to disregard reason in any matter of importance is always fatal in proportion to its importance? How fatal it must be, then, in that matter which infinitely transcends all others in importance? Shall we not, then, all accept the invitation of the text? Could any invitation be less objectionable? "Come and let us reason together, saith the Lord." Come and let us consider the matter; come and let us see what ought to be done; what wisdom suggests; what safety requires; what duty enjoins. Could any invitation be kinder and more acceptable than that? Shall we not, then, gladly accept it? Shall we attend to the voice of reason everywhere else and refuse to attend to it just here where it is most important that we should attend to it?

IV

THE GREAT SALVATION

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”—
HEB. ii. 3.

THE text is closely connected with the preceding chapter. In that chapter the author of the epistle demonstrates by a number of quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures that Christ, even when here on earth, was superior to the angels; that He was “the brightness of the Father’s glory,” and “the express image of His person”; that by Him all things were made and that by Him all things were upheld; that, in short, He was God manifest in the flesh; and, in connection with this demonstration of His divinity, he reminds those to whom he was writing that while in former times God had spoken to them by prophets and by angels, He was in these latter times speaking to them by this glorious being whom he was thus describing; and then draws this solemn practical conclusion: “therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip, for if the words of angels were steadfast and

every transgression received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken to us by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by those that heard Him ;” that is, if the words of angels were steadfast and every transgression of their word was punished, how certain it is that every word of Christ will prove to be steadfast and every transgression of it will be punished also. Such seems to be the logical setting in which the text is found.

It is evident that it teaches two great truths : one is that the salvation of Christ is great ; the other is that we shall not escape if we neglect it. It is further evident that the text teaches that our sin and guilt in neglecting this salvation are aggravated by the fact that it is a “ great salvation.” “ How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? ” In order, then, that we may see how great will be our sin and guilt if we neglect this salvation, and how certainly we shall thereby incur the divine displeasure, it is necessary that we form, if possible, some conception of its greatness. I remark, therefore,

1. That this scheme of salvation is great in its origin. It is the work of God. It was conceived in the councils of eternity. To speak after the manner of men, it is the product of the deliberations of the three Persons of the adorable Trinity. It is true, indeed, that the simple fact

that it is the work of God does not prove its greatness to be peculiar or transcendent, for all things are the work of God, and yet many things are notwithstanding small and unimportant. This scheme of salvation, however, is not only the work of God, but, so far as we know, it is the greatest work that has ever proceeded forth from His forming hands. Just as there is some one production of the great artist in which his skill accomplishes its most illustrious triumph, and some one production of the great orator in which his genius shines forth more dazzlingly than anywhere else, so in this scheme of salvation we have a more glorious exhibition of all the attributes of the divine nature than we have in any other work of which God is the author. Men of the world, indeed, are accustomed to explore the works of nature for the most conclusive evidences of His knowledge, wisdom, power and goodness; but He Himself tells us in His word that the most wonderful manifestations of these attributes He has ever given are to be found in the scheme of salvation of which the text speaks. So much wisdom was necessary to devise it, that it is called "the wisdom of God." So much power is necessary for its execution, that it is also called "the power of God"; and so much mercy is treasured up in it to be bestowed on the children of men that it is everywhere celebrated as the most wonderful manifestation of

His goodness to men He has ever made. This scheme of salvation is great, then, in its origin, since it is not only the work of God, but the greatest work of which He is the author.

2. It is a great scheme of salvation in its perfection. Now the greatest works of men, even those that have been most admired and that have been most prolific of beneficial results to the human race, whether they have been wise schemes of government, intended to secure the liberties and promote the interests of men, or benevolent enterprises, designed to ameliorate the condition of the suffering, have always been characterized by greater or less imperfections and by an incompetency fully to accomplish the great ends they had in view. Their history has often been very brief and not infrequently they have terminated in disappointment and disaster. The past is marked by the numerous wrecks of the best schemes of this sort that men have been able to devise. But this scheme of salvation, although it was projected on an infinite scale; although it runs from the eternity that is past on through the eternity that is future; although it bears, perhaps, on the interests of all beings and all worlds; although it involves innumerable and the deepest and the farthest reaching complications; although it is intended to make provision sufficient for the salvation of the whole human race and at every step of its unfolding to secure

ever increasing measures of glory for God ; although it was intended for a task so vast and glorious as this, it is not characterized by the semblance of a defect. It is in all respects all it was ever intended to be ; and thus far in its development has accomplished every end originally contemplated, and thus it will continue to do until the whole purpose of God with which it was charged in the beginning shall have been fully accomplished, and the eternal destinies of the human race shall have been finally and forever fixed. It is thus a great scheme of salvation in its perfection.

3. It is a great scheme of salvation in the agencies by which it is executed. It is not left for execution in the hands of man ; even of the best men. Some men, indeed, seem to have imagined that they were charged with so great a responsibility, but they were labouring under a most unfortunate and mischievous misapprehension. God does, indeed, require all His people to enlist in the great work and to consecrate to its accomplishment all that they are and all that they have, but only as subordinate agents that have no efficiency except as He confers it. He has not entrusted this plan for execution even into the hands of angels, although they excel in strength, and are holy even as He is holy, and are fervid with zeal for the divine glory. They are required, indeed, to coöperate in the

great work, and from glimpses we may catch here and there in the Scriptures of their movements, we may conclude they are chiefly employed in carrying it out, but only under the divine supervision and with such success as God is pleased to grant. So great is the scheme ; so much is there involved in it affecting the highest interests of men and the glory of the divine name, that God has not considered any finite agency competent for its execution ; and therefore He has kept it supremely in His own hands, and now the Father and the Son and the Spirit are engaged, perhaps we are warranted in saying they are chiefly engaged, in carrying it out. This is the work which in their view transcends all others in importance, and therefore on this work their infinite energies are mainly concentrated. Every movement of providence and every dispensation of grace is so ordered as to make the largest possible contribution to its success. How great a scheme of salvation, then, is this that is considered thus worthy of the first place in the mind and worthy to be the chief object of the infinite energies of the adorable Godhead !

4. This scheme of salvation is great in the blessings it bestows on men. It bestows such blessings as pardon, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, words with which we have become so familiar that some of us may no longer attach to them any important meaning, and yet words,

which if we shall only consider them for a moment, we shall find express the greatest blessings we can receive in this world ; the greatest blessings, indeed, that we can conceive. How can we receive a greater blessing in this world than the pardon of all our sins, that are so many, so great, so inexcusable, so offensive to God, so heinous in themselves, so destructive of our souls ? How can we receive a greater blessing in this world than to have these sins that are as scarlet made white as snow ; these sins that are red like crimson made as wool ? How can we receive a greater blessing in this world than to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, so that old things pass away, the old desires, the old appetites, the old passions, the old character, the old life, and all things become new, the desires new, the aspirations new, the character, the life new ? How can we receive a greater blessing in this life than to be adopted into God's family and to be made God's children ; God's sons and God's daughters ; God's heirs and joint heirs with His own Son to all that God is and to all that God has in so far as we have capacity to receive and to enjoy ? How can we receive a greater blessing in this world than to have begun in us that work of sanctification that shall be carried on through all its progressive stages until we shall be presented faultless before the presence of His glory ; faultless, not simply before the presence of the in-

numerable company of the angels ; that would be much ; faultless, not simply before the presence of God's throne ; that would be more ; faultless, not simply before the presence of some one of the great moral attributes of God as His holiness or His justice, that would be still more ; but faultless before the presence of the combined and concentrated excellence of all the attributes of His nature—faultless before the presence of His glory ! How can we receive in this life greater blessings than these ? Thus this scheme of salvation is so great that it bestows on us even in this life blessings so great that they fill up the utmost measure of our capacity to receive ; the utmost measure, indeed, of our capacity to conceive.

But in order to see the greatness of this scheme, we must consider not only that it bestows upon us in this life such blessings as these, but that it will bestow upon us still greater blessings in the life to come : "glory and honour and immortality ;" "what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive ;" "the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Not only glory, you observe, but a "weight" of glory ; not only that, but an "eternal weight" of glory ; not only that, but "an exceeding, eternal weight of glory ;" not only that, but a "more exceeding eternal weight of glory ;" not only that, but "a far more exceeding eternal weight of glory." Why, if this scheme

of salvation bestowed such blessings as these on only a single soul, I doubt not it could properly be called a great scheme of salvation, but it is to be remembered, in order that its greatness may be fully seen, that it is to bestow these blessings on a multitude that "no man shall be able to number." It seems to be thought, indeed, by some that only a small part of the human race will be saved. It seems to be more in accord, however, with what seems to be demanded by the nature of the case and with the teachings of the Scriptures to suppose that when our Saviour entered upon His great conflict with His great adversary and ours, He did not intend that that conflict should terminate with the great majority of the human race still in that adversary's hands, for that would have looked ever afterwards to all His intelligent creatures too much like a defeat. Nor did He intend that that conflict should terminate in such a way that that adversary should be able to carry off from the field as many evidences of his skill and power as He Himself could exhibit, for that would have looked ever afterwards to all His intelligent creatures too much like a drawn battle; but we may be sure that He intended that that conflict should terminate in a victory so complete, that if anything remained in that adversary's hands, it should be manifest to all the universe that it remained there, not because He could not despoil

him of it, but only because for infinitely wise reasons He had not chosen to do it. It is altogether probable, therefore, that when the consummation of all things shall be reached, while it will be found, indeed, that a great number has perished, it will be found that a so much greater number has been saved, that, as Samuel Davies once expressed it, the lost will bear to the saved only about the same proportion that the inmates in the prisons of an orderly commonwealth bear to the law-abiding citizens. Let us see what probability there is that this will be the ultimate and glorious issue of this great scheme: It is the belief of all evangelical churches that all infants dying in infancy are saved. But up to the present time in the world's history about one-half of the human race has died in infancy. So that we begin this great count with about one-half of the race already saved. Add to that the millions that have been saved since the world began, after they reached years of responsibility, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Add to that the millions more that will be saved in the same way before the millennium shall begin, and add to that all the infants that shall die in infancy before that period shall arrive; and then remember that the millennium is to last a thousand years, and that that may be a definite number for an indefinite, as is so often the case in the Scriptures. At any rate, remember that it is to be at least a thousand

years, and that during that long period the population of the world is to be at its maximum ; that where there are hundreds now there will be thousands then ; that where there are thousands now there will be tens of thousands then ; that where there are tens of thousands now there will be hundreds of thousands then ; that where there are hundreds of thousands now there will be millions then, millions on millions ; that the surface of the earth will be crowded with its teeming multitudes, and that all these multitudes are to be brought to a knowledge of the truth ; that the prayer of the ages is to be answered, and God's kingdom is to come and His will is to be done in earth as it is in heaven. Now aggregate these tremendous numbers and thus see how probable it is that in the long run of the ages the vast majority of the human race will be brought into the kingdom of God. How great a scheme of salvation, then, is this that shall bestow blessings so great on a multitude so great that no man shall be able to number it !

5. This scheme of salvation is great, however, not only in the blessings it bestows on men, but in the glory it confers on God. It would be easy to show how God is far more glorious, not in Himself, for His intrinsic glory cannot be increased, but far more glorious in the view of His intelligent creatures because of this scheme of salvation, than He otherwise would have been.

It would be easy to show how every attribute of His nature has been thus glorified, but for lack of time only a few can be briefly mentioned. His wisdom has been greatly glorified. A problem of great difficulty was presented when His mercy proposed the salvation of men, for to men He had given a law ; that law was holy and just and good ; to that law He had attached appropriate penalties, and those penalties He had pledged Himself to execute, and the truth of His word, and the order of His government, and the dignity of His throne, and the best interests of His creatures, and the glory of His name, demanded that those penalties should be executed, for what is a law worth unless it is enforced, and how can it be enforced unless its penalties are inflicted upon transgressors ? But that law man violated knowingly, deliberately, persistently. How, then, could he be saved ? How was it possible to rescue him from the penalty of the law, and yet at the same time to uphold the law, and rebuke sin, and intimidate transgressors, and vindicate justice and fulfill the pledges that had been given that sin should be punished ? Here was plainly a problem that no finite intelligence could solve. I suppose that if, when our first parents fell in the garden of Eden, a general assembly of the innumerable company of the angels had been called, and God had announced to them what had taken place, and yet had informed them

that if any one of them could suggest a plan by which man could be saved consistently with the holy attributes of his nature, there would have been silence in heaven for more than half an hour. And if some one of the angels, bolder than all the rest, had suggested that it might be done in the way in which afterwards it was done, by the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, the occupant of the middle throne, coming down to the earth and taking on Him the form of a man, and allowing Himself to be mocked and insulted and spit on and scourged, and at last to be put to death as a criminal between two thieves, I suppose all the other angels would have looked the next moment to see Him "hurled with hideous ruin and combustion down to bottomless perdition, there to dwell forever in adamant chains and penal fire" for what they would have regarded as the intolerable blasphemy of such a proposition. So manifest is it that this problem could never have been solved by a finite mind. But the greatness of this scheme of salvation is seen in the fact that it not only saves man, and saves him perfectly, but at the same time upholds the law, and rebukes sin, and intimidates transgressors, and vindicates justice, and fulfills the threatenings that sin should be punished much more perfectly than would have been done if the whole human race had been allowed to perish. Observe, for in-

stance, how it saves man and yet upholds and honours the law : if the law had inflicted its penalty on man, it would have been vindicated and honoured, indeed, and all God's intelligent creatures in every part of the universe would have been profoundly impressed with its awful and inviolable sanctity as they saw the whole race sink into eternal ruin ; but now, since that penalty is not inflicted on man, but, as far as the redeemed are concerned, on the Lord Jesus Christ, by so much as He is greater than man, and He is infinitely greater, by so much is the law more completely vindicated and more gloriously honoured !

It may be shown how even the justice of God is glorified by this scheme of salvation. At first view there would seem to be something incongruous and contradictory in the notion that justice could be glorified in the salvation of the guilty. There would seem to be but one way to glorify justice, and that is by an inflexible execution of the penalty of the law upon all transgressors. And if we had existed before this scheme of salvation was devised, while it might have been possible for us to foresee how the knowledge of God might be glorified by such a scheme, and the power of God and the mercy of God, the very most that it would have been possible for us to foresee in regard to the justice of God would have been that it could come off

from such work only with its honour maintained. The greatness of this scheme of salvation, however, is seen in the fact that it not only saves man and maintains the honour of justice, but saves him gloriously, and yet lifts up that justice immeasurably higher than it was before and invests it with a lustre immeasurably brighter. Even children can see how it is done. If justice had satisfied its claims on man, it would have been honoured, indeed, but only in a finite way, for man is only a finite being; but now since it satisfies its claims on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is honoured in an infinite way, for Christ is an infinite being! What a wonderful achievement is this, that justice, that attribute that stood right over against man's salvation and by its very nature protested against it, should be infinitely more glorified by his salvation than it would have been by his perdition! How great a scheme of salvation is this that can bring about such a result as that!

It may be shown in a word or two how God's mercy is glorified by this scheme. Indeed, we should never have known that God is a merciful being, had it not been for this scheme of salvation. The unfallen angels, indeed, would have had abundant evidence of His goodness in the great blessings they would ever have enjoyed at His hands; but goodness to the innocent is a very different thing from mercy to the guilty;

and, therefore, we learn from this plan of salvation what otherwise we should never have known that God cannot only be good to the innocent, but that He can be merciful to the guilty; infinitely merciful to the infinitely guilty. All the glory, therefore, that shall ever come to His mercy will come through this scheme of salvation. But the measure of that glory will be infinitely great, and, therefore, the scheme that confers that glory is infinitely great also.

Thus have we seen some respects in which this scheme of salvation is great. It is great in its origin; great in its perfection; great in the agencies by which it is executed; great in the blessings it confers on men, and great even in the glory it bestows on God.

Let us now, in conclusion, consider one or two reasons why we shall not escape if we neglect it.

One reason is that we shall thereby become guilty of the greatest ingratitude by which we can be marked. God has provided this salvation for us at infinite expense to Himself; at the expense of the blood and life of His own Son; He has provided it for us when He was under no obligation to do it; and having provided it for us, He has made it known to us and urged it on our acceptance by every consideration that ought to control us as rational beings; and now if after He has provided it for us in such a way as this and urged it upon our acceptance in such a manner

as this, we neglect it ; treat it with such supreme indifference that we do not even give it serious consideration, much less accept it, are we not guilty of as gross ingratitude as could possibly characterize us? Why, by so much as the love was great that prompted this scheme, and the wisdom was great that devised it, and the blessings are great that it offers to confer, is not our ingratitude great in treating it with the indifference by which many of us are characterized? And do we imagine that we can thus treat it without incurring serious consequences? Why, the very point of the question of the text is, How shall we escape ; how shall it be possible for us to escape ; if we treat such a salvation as this in such a way as this?

The other reason I shall mention why we shall not escape if we neglect this salvation is that neglect is in itself a fatal sin. To some, especially to the young, in whose veins the warm blood of youth is still coursing and who are so fond of amusements and pleasures, it may seem so natural to shrink from the consideration of so serious subjects as the great matters involved in this salvation, that they may regard it almost excusable to neglect it. The fact is, however, that this is in itself just as fatal as any other sin they can commit. It is as fatal as skepticism or atheism. Observe how it is : skepticism doubts whether there is a salvation and thus loses its

benefits ; atheism denies that there is a salvation and thus loses its benefits. Neglect fails to avail itself of salvation, and thus loses its benefits, loses them as certainly, as completely, as disastrously as either skepticism or atheism, and, therefore, is in this respect just as fatal as either. Here are three men who have a disease for which there is but one remedy. One of them doubts whether it is a remedy, and for that reason refuses to receive it ; and the second man denies that it is a remedy, and for that reason refuses to receive it ; but they will not more certainly die than will the third man, who, while he admits that it is a remedy, neglects to make use of it. Whatever prevents the use of the remedy is fatal, and neglect prevents the use of the remedy as certainly as any other sin. Ah ! my dear hearers, in order to lose this great salvation it is not necessary that you shall exert yourselves in any violent way. It is not necessary that you shall assail religion. All that it is necessary for you to do is just what many of you may now be doing, quietly and persistently neglect it, and you will as certainly lose all its blessings as by any other sin you can commit.

Take the question of the text, then, home with you, and see what answer you shall be constrained to give it. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?" It is evident that the inspired author of the text could not see how

you were going to escape. Aye, since he was writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, it is evident that God Himself does not see how you are going to escape. Take the question home with you, then, and see if you can see what an inspired writer could not see; see if you can see what God Himself cannot see, how you are going to escape if you neglect so great salvation.

V

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH CHRIST?

“What shall I do then with Jesus which is called the Christ?”—MATT. xxvii. 22.

THESE were the words of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of the Jews, and were uttered in the following circumstances: The Jews were endeavouring with a persevering and relentless cruelty to bring about the death of Christ. On the night before these words were spoken, they had succeeded, through the treachery of Judas Iscariot, in effecting His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, and were now doing all they could to prevail on the authorities to pronounce upon Him the death sentence. They took Him first before Annas, who Luke says was the high priest, not, perhaps, because he was the high priest in fact, for the Roman authorities seem to have removed him, and to have appointed another person in his place, but because he was regarded by the Jews as their high priest according to their law, and they wished, therefore, in the important movement in which they were now engaged to pay him what respect they could, and thus secure his approval, which would have weight in preventing

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opposition to the accomplishment of their plans on the part of those of their countrymen who were friendly to Christ. Next they took Him to Caiaphas, who seems to have been the high priest in actual possession of the office, for from him alone, as wielding the powers of the office, could they secure that condemnation of Him which they so much desired. There an examination of Christ took place, and resulted, as they alleged, in finding Him guilty of the sin of blasphemy, because He claimed to be the Son of God, and no doubt sentence of death, in accordance with their law, prescribing that penalty for that sin, would at once have been pronounced on Him, if authority to pronounce such a sentence had not previously been taken from them by the Roman government. Finally they took Him before Pilate, who, they seem to have thought, would give them permission to put Him to death without any inquiry into the merits of the case, but in that they were much disappointed, for Pilate at once demanded to know what accusation they brought against Him ; of what offense He had been guilty. As the only offense of which they claimed to have found Him guilty before the high priest was blasphemy, an offense of which Pilate, a heathen, would be likely to take no serious account, it was now necessary that they should prefer some charge against Him of which he would take account, and so they de-

clared that He was a leader of sedition among the people throughout the whole country and was claiming to be King of the Jews, thus setting Himself up in rebellion against Cæsar. Instantly Pilate perceived that in that charge they were insincere; for he knew that they were all opposed to the rule Cæsar was exercising over them, and that, therefore, if that was the only offense of which Christ was guilty, instead of condemning Him, they would rather be applauding Him and would be seeking to shield Him from the very penalty they were now endeavouring to have inflicted on Him. He, therefore, took Him into an inner hall, apart from His accusers, and examined Him privately as to His claim that He was the King of the Jews, and having satisfied himself that there was nothing in that claim that threatened any harm to Cæsar, brought Him forth, and announced that he found no fault in Him, and evidently desired to dismiss the case; for he now began to see that if the Jews prosecuted it, no matter how he might finally decide it, he would be involved in serious consequences. He saw, on the one hand, that if he acquitted Him, he would run the risk of being charged at Rome with having failed to punish a man who was in rebellion against Cæsar, and, on the other hand, he saw that, if he condemned Him, he would condemn an innocent man. He was, therefore, very anxious to dismiss the case, but the Jews

more clamorously than ever cried out that from Galilee to Jerusalem He was stirring up the people in opposition to the government. As soon as Pilate thus heard that the offense with which He was charged had been committed in part in Galilee, it seems to have occurred to him that he might get rid of the case by referring it to Herod, who exercised some kind of jurisdiction over that province. He, therefore, bade them go to him. Herod, however, after some inquiries about the case, declined to assume jurisdiction and returned it to Pilate. Pilate now saw that he would be obliged to render a decision, and seems to have resolved that he would do all that he could, consistently with his political interests and safety, to rescue Him out of the hands of His enemies. Having already found that the Jews would not consent to His acquittal, he sought to effect a compromise with them, and he said to them that both Herod and he had examined Him and had found nothing worthy of death in Him, and that, therefore, he would chastise Him and let Him go. To that, however, they would not consent, and, therefore, He resorted to a final expedient. It was customary, at the Passover, which had now arrived, for the Roman governor to release unto them a prisoner whom they would, and he proposed, in accordance with that usage, to release unto them Jesus ; but against that they protested more warmly than they had done

against the other proposition, and declared that in conformity with that usage they wished Barabbas to be released to them, who, perhaps, was a political prisoner of some sort with whom they were more or less in sympathy. Baffled, disappointed, in utter perplexity as to what he was to do with Jesus, he then exclaimed, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" They all answered, "Let Him be crucified; let Him be crucified." Such seems to be the historical setting in which the text is found. In considering it, I remark

I. That it is evident that in the providence of God Pontius Pilate was in such circumstances that he was obliged to render a decision in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ—a decision for Him or against Him. He was obliged to answer in some way the question which he had himself propounded: "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" Christ was on his hands and he was obliged to render a decision in regard to Him before he could get Him off his hands. He had done all he could to avoid rendering a decision. He had referred the case to Herod, but Herod had returned it on his hands. The very least that he could have done would have been summarily to dismiss the case and refuse to have anything to do with it, but even that would have been a decision, and a decision against Christ, for it would have left Him in the

hands of His enemies exposed to their violence. Or, while dismissing the case, he might have protected Him against them; but that also would have been a decision, and a decision in His favour. To take the one or the other of these two courses was the very least that he could do, and yet he could not take either of these courses without rendering a decision in regard to Him. Thus it is clear that in the providence of God Pontius Pilate was in such circumstances that he was completely shut up to render a decision in regard to so important a personage as the Lord Jesus Christ, and that in the nature of the case that decision must be for Him or against Him. There was no possible way to escape it, and therefore, he was in very solemn circumstances.

But all the unconverted present are to-day in similar circumstances. You are not, of course, in precisely the same circumstances in which Pilate was, yet you are nevertheless in such circumstances in regard to Christ that you are as completely shut up to render a decision in regard to Him as Pontius Pilate was. As certain as it was that Christ was on Pontius Pilate's hands, so certain it is that He is on your hands; and as certain as it was that it was necessary for Pilate to render a decision in regard to Him before He could get Him off his hands, so certain it is that it is necessary for you to render a decision in regard to Him before you can get Him off your

hands. In the providence of God you have forced upon you for an answer the very question Pilate had forced on him, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" He presents Himself before the bar of your reason and consciences. He makes known His case to you. He tells you that He is your Creator; that He gave you all the powers with which you are endowed. He tells you that He is your Preserver; that He bestows on you day after day all those blessings by which you are kept in existence and which you so much enjoy; and He tells you also that He is your Redeemer; that when there was no eye to pity nor arm to save, that His eye pitied you and His arm was stretched forth for your deliverance; that He has redeemed you, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with His own precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;" and on such grounds as these He claims all the love of your hearts and all the service of your hands. Such is His case as He makes it known to you, and He demands that you shall render a decision in regard to it, and there is no possible way by which you can escape it. You cannot escape rendering a decision by referring the case to some one else, as Pilate referred his case to Herod. No one else can decide this case for you. Every one of you must decide it for himself. You cannot escape rendering a decision by summarily dis-

missing the case, and refusing to have anything to do with it, for that would be a decision, and would be a decision against Christ, for it would be a refusal to admit His claims. You cannot escape a decision by postponing the case until some future time, for that very postponement would be a decision, and against Christ, for it would be postponing until the future what He demands shall be decided at once. Thus it is evident that, just like Pontius Pilate, you are to-day in the providence of God in such circumstances that you are completely shut up to render a decision in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ; a decision for Him or against Him; that there are no possible means by which you can avoid it. If he then was in solemn circumstances, as you cannot but see that he was, you must be in solemn circumstances also.

II. It is evident that in the providence of God Pontius Pilate was not only in such circumstances that he was obliged to render a decision in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, but (what has already been implied, but needs special mention) he was obliged to render it at once. He was on his judgment seat; the alleged criminal was before him; the witnesses were present and had in one form and another already given their testimony. He knew the character of charges they brought against Christ and on what grounds those charges rested. Thus the

case was distinctly before him, and he knew what he ought to do ; he knew that he ought at once to decide in Christ's favour and set Him at liberty. That he knew this is plain from the fact that he tried in so many ways to effect His acquittal ; from the fact expressly asserted that he knew that from envy the Jews had delivered Him into his hands ; from the fact also that he had already declared that he found no fault in Him, and from the further fact that after he had consented to allow the Jews to do with Him what they would, he sought to relieve himself from all responsibility for what they might do. These facts prove that he understood the case ; that he knew he ought to declare Christ innocent and protect Him from those who were seeking to destroy Him ; and because all the power of the great Roman government was behind him and at his immediate command to enforce his decision, he ought to have rendered it at once. There was no righteous reason for delay. Thus Pilate was plainly in such circumstances in the providence of God that he was not only obliged to render a decision in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ—a decision for Him or against Him—but he was obliged to render it at once.

But again all the unconverted present are in similar circumstances. You are not only obliged to decide in regard to Christ, but you are to decide while these services are in progress ; you

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are obliged to answer without any delay the question of the text, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" As has already been shown, He presents His claims upon you. He demands an immediate decision, and there is no possible way by which it may be escaped. You cannot escape rendering an immediate decision by saying you do not understand the case and that you must take time to inform yourself. You understand it well enough. You understand that all you have to do is to yield to His claims; to accept Him as your Saviour and Lord and Master, and, therefore, you do not need more time for self-information. You cannot escape rendering an immediate decision by saying that you have not time to render it; that for a matter of so much importance you must have more time for consideration. All you have to do is to yield to His claims, as has been said, and you can do that in a moment of time if you are willing. Besides, time is for this purpose before it is for any other purpose. You must "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." You cannot escape rendering an immediate decision by saying you have more important matters on your hands and that they must be allowed the precedence. That would not be true. Nothing else is half so important as this. You cannot escape rendering an immediate decision by postponing the matter

to the future. As we have already seen, that itself would be a decision, and a decision against Christ. It would be a refusal at once to admit His claims as He righteously demands you shall do. It is clear, then, that like Pontius Pilate, you are in the providence as completely shut up to render a decision in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ at once as he was.

III. Since Pilate was not only obliged to render a decision in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, but obliged to render it at once, it is plain he was in very solemn circumstances, for, however he might decide, whether for Christ or against Him, consequences of the utmost importance would at once follow. If he decided right; if he decided for Christ, Christ would be rescued out of the hands of His enemies; an attempted outrage of the most aggravated sort would be rebuked and prevented; law would be upheld; innocence would be vindicated, and his own integrity as a man and a judge would be preserved and splendidly illustrated. Consequences so important as these would at once follow, if he decided right. But if he decided wrong; if he decided against Christ, then the best and most innocent being the world had ever seen would be ruthlessly murdered; the greatest crime in the world's history would be committed; law and justice would be trampled in the dust as never before, and the Jews and Pilate him-

self would incur immeasurable guilt. Consequences as dreadful as these would at once follow, if he decided wrong. Thus, tremendous issues were at stake, no matter how he might decide ; and yet decide he must, and that at once. It is difficult to conceive how he could have been in more solemn circumstances.

And yet, unconverted friends, you are again in similar circumstances. You are as much obliged to decide and decide at once, as Pontius Pilate was, and yet no matter how you may decide consequences just as important must at once ensue. Decide right ; decide for Christ ; admit His claims on you, and instantly all your sins will be pardoned ; instantly you will become new creatures in Christ Jesus and old things will pass away and all things will become new ; instantly you will be adopted into God's family and become God's children and heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ to all that God is and to all that God has, so far as you have capacity to receive and to enjoy ; instantly you will have begun in you that renewing and sanctifying process which will be carried on through all its progressive stages until you shall be presented at last faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Decide right, and consequences thus of infinite importance will at once ensue. But decide wrong ; decide against Christ, and you will

not only inflict on Him one of the greatest wrongs in your power, but how deeply and disastrously you may wrong yourselves only the revelations of the last day may disclose. Thus you must decide and decide at once, and yet such consequences as these must at once inevitably follow. How could you be, then, in more solemn circumstances than you now are? And how careful you should be what your decision is! What, then, is your decision? This leads me to remark

IV. That Pilate, after much hesitation and delay, determined to decide against Christ; to deliver Him into the hands of His enemies. He knew he was doing wrong; he knew he was surrendering an innocent being to a dreadful fate; he knew he was permitting a great crime to be committed; he knew he was allowing to be trampled into the dust the very laws that it was his duty to uphold and defend; he knew he was going contrary to his own reason and contrary to his own conscience; he knew he was doing in the case the very thing he ought not to do. All the evidence shows that he had a distinct and painful consciousness that he was thus doing wrong. Yet he did it. He made an effort, indeed, to mitigate his guilt. He took water, it is said, and washed his hands before all present, by which he meant to say, "I have tried to save this man. I have tried to preserve Him

from that cruel fate with which you are threatening Him ; I have done all I could to do it. But you insist on destroying Him. Take Him, therefore, and do with Him as you list ; but I hereby wash my hands of all responsibility for what you may do." Thus did he seek to mitigate his guilt. But how vain the attempt ! Although a Roman governor, sustained by all the power of the Roman government, surrendering an innocent man into the hands of a mob to be cruelly murdered, and then attempting to hold that mob responsible for his own cowardice and neglect of duty ! How utterly vain was that ! Some time ago a book was published with the somewhat startling title, "Letters from Hell." In the book the author, professedly writing from that lost world, undertakes to relate how the lost are there employed. He states that they are there employed somewhat as they were here ; that those who sought wealth here are seeking it there and that those who sought honour and pleasure here are there seeking the same objects ; that it is a part of the doom of the lost that they are necessitated to seek there forever what it is impossible they shall ever find. As he explored the desolate region, he often saw a man sitting on the bank of a river washing blood off his hands, and finally he inquired who he was. "That is Pontius Pilate," he was told, "Roman governor of the Jews, who allowed the

Saviour to be murdered by His enemies. He is washing the Saviour's blood off his hands. He has been sitting there for more than eighteen hundred years trying to wash it off, but you see his hands are just as bloody still as they ever were." Ah! Pilate could not get such blood as that off his hands by means of a little water. Pilate, then, in deciding against Christ, knew he was doing wrong; that he was incurring great guilt.

But here, once more, unconverted friends, your circumstances are similar to his. If you decide against Christ, you will know, as well as he did, that you have done wrong. You will know that you have wronged Him who has the strongest and tenderest claim on your affections; that you have disregarded the most important of all the commands God lays upon you, for until you obey His command to receive Christ, you cannot acceptably obey any other command He gives you. You will know that you have gone contrary to your own reason and to your own consciences, and that, just like Pilate, you have done in the case the very thing you ought not to have done. You cannot to-day decide against Christ without knowing that you are thus doing wrong.

And now, if in such circumstances you decide against Christ, to what consequences do you expose yourselves? We may learn something

about these consequences by considering the consequences incurred by those mentioned in the text and context as deciding against Him. Judas Iscariot had something to do with this decision against Him. It was by his treachery that He was betrayed into the hands of His enemies, and a few hours afterwards, frenzied by the intolerable stings of a guilty conscience, he laid his own hands in deadly violence on his own person, and "went to his own place." Annas had something to do with it. When he might have set Christ at liberty, or at least have used his influence in that direction, he sent Him bound like a common felon to Caiaphas; and afterwards a mob, just like that which now had Christ in its hands, pulled down his house and dragged his son through the streets to the place of his execution. Caiaphas had something to do with it. He permitted Christ to be mocked and insulted and scourged in his very presence, and then sent Him to Pilate, and the very next year he was publicly disgraced by being publicly deposed from the high office whose powers he had thus so grossly abused. Herod had something to do with it. He sent Christ back to Pilate when he might have set Him at liberty; and he died in exile and infamy. Pilate had something to do with it. He rendered this decision against Christ; and afterwards, like Judas Iscariot, and it is suspected for the same reason,

became his own executioner. The Jews present had something to do with it. They demanded it. They said, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" and afterwards so many of themselves and of their children were crucified that Josephus, their own historian, states they could no longer find wood to make crosses and no longer find space on which to set the crosses up. They said, "His blood be upon us and our children," and for more than eighteen hundred years it has been upon them and their children, but alas! not as a cleansing blood that has saved them, but as a caustic blood that has destroyed them! They said, "Away with Him! away with Him!" and they tried to put Him away, and when they put His body in that rock-bound tomb, and when they rolled that great stone up to its mouth, and securely fixed it in its place, and placed on it the inviolable seal of the great Roman government, and when they had placed around it a sufficient guard of Roman soldiers, they thought they had put Him so completely away that He would never be heard of again, and so far as they were concerned, they had put Him so completely away that more than eighteen hundred years have passed, and He has not returned to them yet! Ah! my dear hearers, it is a fearful thing for such worms of the dust as we are to lift ourselves up out of our nothingness and guilt and arrogate to ourselves the

tremendous importance of rendering a decision against our own Creator, Preserver and Redeemer. In all these cases we see how disastrous the consequences are, and, therefore, how careful we should be not to incur the guilt of so great a sin.

The time is at hand when our present position with reference to Christ will be reversed. Now He stands before us ; then we shall stand before Him. Now we render a decision in regard to Him. Then He will render a decision in regard to us. If, then, we now decide against Him, do we not at the same time decide against ourselves, for does not our decision against Him now make inevitable His decision against us then? "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

VI

THE FUTURE STATE

“For we shall see Him as He is.”—1 JOHN iii. 3.

IN some respects we know very little about the future state. We do not even know where heaven is. The Scriptures say, indeed, that it is above us, and it has always been the usage of the Church and the world so to speak of it. But we cannot be sure that the language of the Scriptures here is to be taken literally, for if heaven be directly above us, it must also be directly above those who live on the opposite side of the globe; for their Bibles read just as ours do. As our Bibles say heaven is directly above us, so theirs say heaven is directly above them; and thus we should have heaven in two different and entirely opposite directions at the same time, which, of course, cannot be true, unless, as may be the fact, it is an immense sphere that on all sides round encompasses this sphere of our present existence.

As we do not certainly know where heaven is, so, except to a limited extent, we do not know what it is. We have in the Scriptures, indeed,

descriptions of it, but the language of these descriptions, we observe, is taken from the material things by which we are now surrounded and with which we are now familiar, and, therefore, we cannot be sure but that, as in so many other cases, it is language adapted to our present modes of conception and forms of knowledge, and so not intended to tell us exactly what heaven is, but rather intended simply to assure us that it is a place of great beauty and excellence and blessedness. It is said, for instance, that it has walls and gates of precious stones ; streets of shining gold ; fountains of living water ; gardens of luscious fruits ; that there is no night there and that it has no need of the light of the sun, but that the Lord God Himself is the light thereof ; that God has there His tabernacle and that there He dwells with men ; that there is there no sickness, nor death, nor crying, but that God Himself wipes all tears from all faces ; and such statements as these fully warrant us to believe that it is a place of great blessedness and glory. Still, how much of this language is to be understood literally and how much figuratively, we have no means now of certainly determining.

Further : As we do not know certainly where heaven is, and, except in a limited way, what it is, so, except in the same way, we do not know how we shall there be employed. We know, indeed, that we shall be employed in part in wor-

ship ; that we shall forever ascribe to Him " who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God," dominion and power and glory. We know this because when the author of this text was on the island of Patmos, enjoying those wonderful visions of heaven through the " gates ajar," he saw the multitude of the redeemed thus engaged. But how else our redeemed powers shall be employed we have little definite information. No doubt, however, there will be service there as well as worship, for it does not seem at all probable that the infinite activities of God will abruptly and forever cease as soon as His people are all saved, and that they shall no longer be required to serve Him just when, having been entirely delivered from sin and perfectly sanctified, they shall for the first time be in a condition to render Him a service somewhat worthy of His great and holy name. It seems much more probable that somehow and somewhere God's almighty energies will continue to be exerted and that His redeemed people will forever coöperate with Him in the accomplishment of ends promotive of their highest interests and of the glory of His great name. No doubt much of the time of His redeemed people will be expended in increasing their knowledge, their knowledge of Him, that they may know Him better, and love Him more, and render Him a

more exalted service. Perhaps with vision perfectly purged from sin they shall in the light of the eternal day reread that revelation which God has made of Himself in His word, in which there is so much that cannot now be fully understood and restudy that revelation which He has made of Himself in His providence in which there are so many problems that cannot now be fully solved. Perhaps many will be the glorious excursions on which His people shall go to now distant and unknown parts of the universe that they may see how other heavens as well as our own declare the glory of God, and how other firmaments as well as our own show His handiwork, and how other days as well as our own utter speech of Him and how other nights as well as our own show knowledge of Him. So much as this we may claim to know, but beyond this our knowledge does not extend very far. It is enough, however, for every Christian to be assured that since heaven is the place where God is forever to dwell with His people and where He is to reveal Himself to them in all His glory, that they may see how glorious He is, it is a place as blessed and glorious as infinite love can prompt and infinite wisdom devise and infinite power construct.

It ought to be added that, as our knowledge of the future state of the redeemed is imperfect, so also is our knowledge of the future state of

the unredeemed. As we do not know certainly where heaven is, so we do not know certainly where hell is. As we do not know precisely what kind of a place heaven is, so we do not know precisely what kind of a place hell is. As we do not know exactly how the redeemed will spend their eternity, so we do not know exactly how the unredeemed will spend theirs. There is, however, one fact in regard to these two states that should never be forgotten, and that is, that whether the language of the Scriptures about them be literal or figurative, they labour to impress upon us the great truths that the one state is immeasurably blessed and glorious and the other immeasurably wretched and miserable. No candid person who is willing to take the Scriptures as they stand can fail to see distinctly so much as that.

But while thus in some respects the teachings of the Scriptures in regard to the future state are somewhat obscure, in other respects, and some of them most important, their teachings are clearer, perhaps, than many have observed. The text, for instance, brief as it is, reveals a great deal. It is a little window opening into the future state, through which we may see a great deal, if only we shall take the time and have the patience to look carefully.

1. Looking through this little window into the future state we see that we shall then be

conscious. We shall "see," the text says. Paul, in one of his epistles, says we shall "know," but if we shall see and know, of course we shall think and feel; that is, we shall be conscious; and it is this tremendous fact that invests the future with all its interest and importance to us. No matter what may be in the future; no matter what in the one state or in the other; no matter what objects of beauty in the one or of terror in the other; no matter what of blessedness in the one or woe in the other, if we shall not then be conscious, it will not in the slightest degree concern us. If we shall not see what is about us, and know it, and think about it, and feel it, it will concern us no more than if it did not exist; but if we shall see it, and know it, and think about it, and feel it, then it will concern us to the full extent that it shall be adapted to affect us with happiness or misery. Now that we shall then be thus conscious is not only indicated in the text, but plainly taught in many passages of God's word. It is taught, for instance, by our Saviour in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. In that parable the Saviour draws aside the veil that lies over the mysterious future and permits us to look in on its awful realities. He points out the two states to us, a redeemed man—Abraham—in the one state, and an unredeemed man—Dives—in the other state; and He represents them both as being

conscious, as seeing, knowing, thinking and feeling. He represents Abraham as seeing. He sees Dives. He represents Dives as seeing. He sees Abraham. He represents Abraham as knowing. He knows Dives. He represents Dives as knowing. He knows Abraham. He represents Abraham as thinking. Some of his thoughts are expressed. "Between us and you," he says to Dives, "there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." He represents Dives as thinking. Some of his thoughts are expressed. "I have five brethren." "I pray thee therefore that thou wouldst send Lazarus to my father's house, that he may testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment." He represents Abraham as feeling. Some of his feelings are expressed. "Son, remember," he says to Dives, "that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." He represents Dives as feeling. Some of his feelings are expressed. "Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." Thus he represents them both as being distinctly, vividly conscious; one conscious that he is saved; the other conscious that he is lost;

one conscious of the happiness of heaven ; the other conscious of the woes of hell. And I repeat that it is this tremendous fact that invests the future with all its concern for us. Those, therefore, that deny, as some do, that one class, at least, the wicked, will be conscious in the future state, reject one of the most explicit lessons the Saviour ever taught, as we see in this parable to which reference has just been made.

2. Looking again through this little window into the future state, we not only see that we shall then see, but we see something of what we shall then see. "We shall see *Him*." No doubt, however, by the same powers of vision by which we shall see Him, we shall see much else. If there be walls and gates of precious stones, we shall see them. If there be streets of shining gold, we shall see them. If there be fountains of living water, we shall see them. If there be gardens of luscious fruits, we shall see them. If there be a Father's house of many material mansions which Christ has gone before to prepare for His people, we shall see them. If there be a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God ; the new Jerusalem, the city of the great King, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole universe, we shall see it, and shall walk round about it, and tell the towers thereof and mark well its bulwarks and

consider its palaces. And we shall see the innumerable company of the angels, and the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and all the loved ones who have gone before and all the loved ones who shall come after. In short, we shall see what eye never saw before, and what ear never heard, and what it never entered into the heart of man to conceive. But what it most concerns us to observe is, that we shall "see Him." Now we do not see Him. Perhaps one reason is that our powers of vision are inadequate for the purpose. There are other things that we cannot now see. We cannot see the air that we are now breathing. We cannot see any of the forces of nature. We cannot see that greatest of all forces, the force by which the universe is kept in order, every sun and moon and star and atom of matter in its appointed place. We cannot see the souls of one another. We cannot see the souls of those who stand to us in the most intimate and precious relations of life. We cannot see them, not only when they are incarnated in their earthly bodies, but when their bodies are being destroyed by the ravages of disease; when their tabernacles are being taken down; when their tents are being struck, and when their souls are struggling to disentangle themselves from the integuments of the

flesh and when they are emerging and pluming and spreading their wings for their everlasting flight; even then, no matter how much we may desire to do it and no matter how much we may strain our eyes to do it, we can catch no glimpse of them. We cannot see even our own souls. We can look within and see their thoughts and their volitions and their feelings, their activities of different kinds, but themselves we cannot see. Thus there are a number of things we cannot now see, and so, although by virtue of His omnipresence, God is, in all the fullness of the attributes of His nature, equally present at every point in His almost illimitable universe, we cannot see Him. We can see many evidences of His presence, but Himself we cannot see. But then we shall see Him; see Him whom our hearts love; see Him in all His infinite excellence and glory; see Him as He shall forever reveal Himself to His people; and as here on earth, grand objects, grand paintings, grand statuary, grand scenery exerts upon us an exalting and ennobling influence, so then, under the influence of the perfect vision we shall have of Him, we shall be instantly transformed into His image and have instantly enstamped upon us His likeness. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

It should be added that what shall thus be true of the redeemed will also, in important re-

spects, be true of the unredeemed. They shall not only see, but from the Scriptures we see something of what they shall see. If there be a "lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," they shall see it. If there be "a smoke of torment that ascendeth up forever," they shall see it. If there be "a worm that dieth not," they shall see it. If there be legions of lost angels; lost because they refused the rightful rule of their Lord; they shall see them. If there be multitudes of lost men, "weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth," they shall see them; and they shall also "see Him," at least in the sense that they shall see Him as He shall vindicate His law in inflicting on them forever its righteous penalties.

3. Looking again through this little window into the future state, we see not only that we shall see, and something of what we shall see, but we see how we shall see: we shall see accurately. We shall not only see Him but "we shall see Him as He is." And no doubt we shall not only "see Him as He is," but we shall also see everything else as it is. The redeemed shall see heaven as it is; the kingdom as it is; its law as it is; its worship as it is; its service as it is; its happiness as it is; its glory as it is; and the unredeemed shall see hell as it is and its woe as it is. Then, therefore, men shall see whether, indeed, there is such a God as the

Scriptures reveal. Then they shall see whether He is merely an impersonal inscrutable force, the source of all the forces we now see in operation in the universe. Then they shall see whether He is only a principle of moral order in the universe making for righteousness. Then they shall see whether He is merely the Father of the human race, so indulgent of His children, as not to call them to any serious account for their sins against Him, inflicting on them no punishment for their sins, except such suffering as is incident to the present life ; or, if He inflicts any suffering in the future, does not inflict very much, or, if He inflicts very much, does not inflict it very long. Then they shall see whether there is, indeed, such a place as heaven and such a place as hell, and whether the one place is as glorious as the Scriptures represent it to be and the other as dreadful as they declare. Then they shall see whether there was any other name given under heaven among men whereby they must be saved, except the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then they shall see whether there was any other way of being saved through Him except by faith in Him. Then they shall see whether religion is that unimportant matter which so many now persist in regarding it. Then they shall see what a man gains if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul. Then they shall see whether they ought to have given all their time and

energies to their business and pleasures instead of seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness. Then they shall see whether the Scriptures, in regard to all the great subjects of which they treat, were an infallible rule of faith and practice. Then they shall see in all respects the truth in regard to the future state, for they shall be right in the midst of its awful realities and shall see them as they are. Then, in short, all the errors into which they permitted themselves here inexcusably to fall will be corrected and the consequences of these errors will be incurred. How careful, then, should we now be in the formation of our opinions in regard to that state! If our theories determined our future state, then we might form what theories we please. But our theories have little to do with it. The facts in regard to God and law and sin and salvation and heaven and hell; the simple, unalterable and eternal facts; they and they alone shall determine our eternal state. Not what we may wish to be true; not what we may too hastily conclude to be true; not what we may allow men to persuade us is true, but what is true and what shall forever remain true, that and that alone shall determine our eternal state. How exceedingly careful then should we be what theories we form in regard to it! And since there is no book in the world that can give us any reliable information concerning it except the Bible, how careful

we should be to see to it that all the theories we form on the subject are based on its teachings !

4. Looking once more through this little window into the future state, we not only see that we shall see, and something of what we shall see, and how we shall see, but by implication at least, we see that as we shall be affected by what we shall then see, our eternity will be one of happiness or of misery. If, when we shall arrive in the future state, and shall see everything as it is ; God as He is ; His kingdom as it is ; His worship as it is and His service as it is, we shall find ourselves in harmony with Him and the things of His kingdom ; so perfectly in harmony that we shall be able with delight to spend all eternity in His worship and service, of course our eternity will be one of happiness ; but if, when we arrive in that state, we find ourselves out of harmony with Him and the things of His kingdom, as the unconverted now are, of course our eternity will be one of wretchedness and woe ; for there is but one source of enjoyment in that state. Here we have a number of sources of enjoyment. Our earthly material homes are a source of enjoyment. The social relations in which we stand one to another are a source of enjoyment. Our secular pursuits are a source of enjoyment and our secular amusements and pleasures. But there will be no such sources of enjoyment there. No material homes such as we now have ; no

such social relations as those in which we now stand ; no secular pursuits and amusements and pleasures. No source of enjoyment except God and the things of His kingdom. If, therefore, when we arrive in that state and see everything as it is, we find ourselves so out of harmony with God and the things of His kingdom, that we shall not be able to enjoy them forever, our eternity must be one of wretchedness and woe.

Such are some of the things we see in looking through this little window into the future state. How shall we be affected by what we thus see? Since there is but one source of happiness in the future state, and since that will not be a source of happiness to us unless we shall be in harmony with it, and since we can be brought into harmony with it only by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, how earnestly should we all seek those influences ; and since life is so short and so uncertain, how earnestly ought we to seek those influences at once ! “ Now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation.” “ To-day if ye will hear His voice, no longer harden your heart.”

VII

THE CONDEMNATION

“And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”—JOHN iii. 19.

IN the preceding verse there is a declaration of our Saviour too little considered by the unconverted, and, perhaps, even by Christians. “He that believeth not is condemned already.” The unconverted usually imagine that they are only in danger of being condemned; that that is something that may hereafter come upon them; that when the trump of God shall sound and the voice of the Son of God shall be heard, summoning men to the judgment seat, and when all men shall be gathered before the final Judge, then condemnation may be inflicted upon them. Such, however, is not the teaching of our Saviour. “He that believeth not is condemned already.” Condemnation is not something, therefore, against which the unconverted are to be on their guard, lest they may hereafter incur it, as the unconverted are apt to think, but it is something that has been incurred already, and, therefore, all they can do in regard to it, and what they ought to do with all haste

and earnestness is, to avail themselves of those means which God has provided by which alone that condemnation may be revoked.

The ground of that condemnation is announced in the text : " And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."

Fully to appreciate the teaching of the text it is, perhaps, as important to observe what it does not say as it is to observe what it does say.

I. Let us observe that it does not say that anybody is condemned because of any decree of God in regard to him, formed in the councils of eternity, cutting him off from salvation, although he now sincerely desires to obtain that great blessing from His hands. God has never made any such decree as that. Our Church does not teach that He has ever made any such decree as that, although it is sometimes represented as so teaching by those who are not correctly informed. It is true, of course, that in the councils of eternity, God did form decrees, or, what is the same thing, make plans, in regard to the human race He intended to bring into existence ; plans affecting all the interests of men, their temporal interests and their spiritual interests. It is impossible to believe that He would bring them into existence without forming beforehand plans,

worthy of the infinite attributes of His nature, as to what He would do with them ; as to the government He would establish over them ; as to the laws by which He would govern them, and as to the rewards He would bestow upon them for obedience and the penalties He would inflict for disobedience. What some of those plans were we can now ourselves to some extent see. We can see something of His plans in regard to man's secular interests, in the secular blessings He bestows upon him, and something of His plans in regard to His merely moral interests in His dealings with him under that moral government to which He has subjected him. But as He thus formed plans beforehand in regard to His secular and moral interests, which we now see Him carrying out, so we are obliged to believe He formed plans beforehand in regard to His spiritual interests for time and for eternity, and that He is now carrying them out also ; carrying them out just as they were originally formed, for if they were infinitely wise and righteous and good plans, as they must have been to be worthy of Him, He ought now to be carrying them out just as originally formed. Still, while all this is true, and while every intelligent person is obliged to admit that it is true, he has made no plan or formed any decree that cuts off from salvation anybody who sincerely desires that blessing. He is represented by the

prophet Ezekiel as saying, "As I live I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11); but would He say that if in the eternity past He had by any decree of His closed the doors of His kingdom against any who now sincerely desire to enter it? He is also represented as saying, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). But would He say that if in the past He had by any fiat of His own will put salvation beyond the reach of any who now sincerely desire to obtain it? Surely not. In the multitude, then, that will appear on the left hand in that day there will not be one who shall be able to say, "I desired to be saved; I sought after salvation; I did all I could to obtain it; I strove to enter in at the straight gate, but a decree of God put an insuperable obstacle in my way." That is not said in the text to be the ground of condemnation, nor is it said to be anywhere else in the Scriptures.

II. The text does not say that any one is necessarily condemned because he is born into the world with a sinful nature. The unconverted sometimes say, "I came into the world with a sinful nature. By virtue of that covenant into which God entered with Adam in the Garden of Eden, making him the representative of the human race, I am involved in the consequences

of his sin ; in the consequences of a sin committed thousands of years before I was born ; in the consequences of a sin with which I never had anything to do ; to which I never gave my consent and to which I never had even the opportunity of giving my consent ; and the result is I came into the world with a sinful nature. It is imposed upon me from the outside by a process that I could not resist and that I never had even the opportunity to resist ; and now for this sinful nature I am held responsible ; for it I am condemned. Is that right ? Is that just ? Can that be vindicated at the bar of reason and conscience ?” So the unconverted sometimes express themselves. But in answer it may be said, for one thing, that it has never yet been proved that anybody is finally condemned on the sole ground that he came into the world with a sinful nature. All evangelical churches hold that all infants dying in infancy are saved ; but if all infants dying in infancy are saved, of course no one is finally condemned on the sole ground that he is born with a sinful nature ; for, if so, then all infants dying in infancy would be thus condemned. But, while infants dying in infancy are not thus condemned, it may be clearly shown how those who have reached years of intelligence and responsibility, and still have these sinful natures, may be justly condemned on account of them. Here is a man rapidly wasting away

under the ravages of a disease he has inherited from his parents. But for this disease there is a cure; and he knows that there is. That cure has been often offered to him. He has inexcusably refused to receive it. The only reason why he has refused to receive it has been that he would rather have the disease than to have any cure for it. In other words, he is unwilling to be cured. Although, then, he has inherited the disease, is he not as responsible for having it now as if he had not inherited it at all, but had got it through his own agency? Well, this illustrates the case of the sinner before God. He has a dreadful malady. He has inherited it from his first parents. But for that malady there is a remedy; a divine and infallible remedy. It has in instances without number been urged on his acceptance, and in instances without number he has refused to receive it; and the only reason why he has refused to receive it is that he would rather have sin than to have any remedy for sin. Is he not then responsible for having it? Not responsible for being in his present condition when he is so contented in it; so well pleased with it; so determined to remain in it that he will not consent that God Himself shall rescue him out of it! If a man is not responsible in such circumstances, when would he be? But while the sinner may thus be held responsible for his sinful nature, he is not necessarily con-

demned on account of it, because there is an infallible remedy for it, and that remedy may at any moment be successfully applied.

III. The text does not teach that anybody is necessarily condemned because he is a great sinner. We are all great sinners. Some seem to think they are not, but they are labouring under a most unfortunate and mischievous delusion. We are all great sinners because we have sinned against a God who is great—great in His infinite excellence and glory and great in His goodness to us. We are all great sinners because we have sinned against obligations that are great—as great as can be conceived. We are all great sinners because we have sinned against a law that is great—great in the reasonableness and righteousness of the claims it makes upon us for love and service. We are all great sinners because we have sinned against light that is great—the great light of reason and of conscience and of nature and of revelation. We are all great sinners because we have sinned against souls that are great—great in their possibilities of development into the highest forms of moral and spiritual excellence; and because we have sinned against so much that is great, we are great sinners. Before there can be any such thing as a little sinner, there must first be a little God, and little obligations, and a little law, and little light, and little souls. But, while

we are all thus great sinners, we are not, therefore, necessarily condemned, because great sinners may be saved. "The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," from the greatest as well as from the least. Though our sins be as scarlet, it can make them white as snow; though they be red like crimson, it can make them as wool (Isa. i. 18). Not only may great sinners be saved, but great sinners have been saved. Paul was a great sinner. Near the end of his life, he said that he was the "chief of sinners." And we ourselves can see why he was a great sinner. He was a great sinner because he sinned against great light. He sinned for a long time against the great light that came from the Old Testament Scriptures. Those Scriptures contained many prophecies in regard to the coming Messiah, and all those prophecies, in so far as they then called for fulfillment, had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth and it could be, and had been, demonstrated that they had been fulfilled in Him; but he closed his eyes against all the clear light that came from that source. He for some time closed his eyes also against all the light that came from the earthly ministry of our Saviour; against all the light that came from His character as He was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners"; against all the light that came from His teachings, as "He spake as never man spake"; against all the

light that came from His works as He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, health to the sick, and life to the dead ; against all the light that came from His death that took place in circumstances so remarkable that the Roman centurion, charged with His execution, as he withdrew from the cross, smote on his breast and exclaimed, " Truly that was the Son of God ; " against all the light that came from His resurrection, attested, as it was, by so much and by so conclusive testimony, and against all the light that came from the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when His presence was demonstrated by tongues of fire on the heads of the apostles and by their ability to speak in tongues with which before they had had no acquaintance ; against all this clear light he for some time sinned. He rejected Christ, and not only did that, but persecuted His followers ; arrested them ; imprisoned them ; scourged them ; being exceedingly mad against them, he pursued them to strange cities, and when he could, compelled them to apostatize from the faith they had professed in Him ; aye, when he could, compelled them to blaspheme that worthy name by which they were called. Thus he was a great sinner. He himself said that he was " the chief of sinners," and when he said that I suppose he said what he meant and meant what he said. It is said, indeed, by some that

that statement was not made as a fact, but only as an expression of humility on his part. But true humility does not consist in saying about oneself what is not true. Paul, then, according to testimony he himself gives under the inspiration of the Spirit, was "the chief of sinners." Yet he was saved, and he gives us as one reason why he was saved, that in him Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should thereafter believe on Him to life everlasting (1 Tim. i. 16). That is, one reason why God had mercy on him was that he was such a sinner that in his salvation the mercy of Christ would be seen to be so great that it would serve as an encouragement to other great sinners to hope in His grace.

Not only Paul, however, but many other great sinners have been saved. No doubt those who put our Saviour to death were great sinners; for He had furnished the most conclusive evidence that He was their long predicted and long expected Messiah; yet they rejected Him, and mocked Him, and insulted Him, and spat on Him, and publicly whipped Him and crucified Him between two thieves. Yet, no doubt, amongst the three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost and amongst the five thousand mentioned later, a number of them might have been found. I should not be surprised if it shall be found in that day that he was saved, who, seeing

a thorn-bush growing by the wayside, plucked it up and hastily twisting it into something like a crown, thrust it down on His brows. Nor should I be surprised if it shall be found that he was saved also who wielded that dreadful scourge that so cruelly lacerated His sacred person ; and I doubt not that many who in that day hooted and jeered, and mocked and cursed around His cross, will in that day be heard singing, "Unto Him that loved us, 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 forever and ever" (Rev. i. 5). And with what wonder and admiration and thanksgiving and praise shall they thus sing when they shall remember that the very blood with which they had been washed from their sins was the blood they had shed with their own wicked hands. Not only, then, may great sinners be saved, but great sinners have been saved. Indeed, one of the great purposes God has in view in the scheme of salvation is accomplished by the salvation of great sinners. One object He has in view in the salvation of men is "in the ages to come to show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 7). But He cannot show the exceeding riches of that grace; He cannot enable us to see its height and depth and length and breadth, except as He saves some

of the greatest sinners of the race. Great sinners, therefore, have been saved, and no doubt will continue to be saved to the end of time.

IV. The text does not teach that anybody is condemned because of any unwillingness on God's part to interpose in his behalf. God has demonstrated His willingness to save in the fullest and most conclusive way. He has given His word with all its precious teachings for that purpose. He has given His Church with all its sacred ordinances for that purpose. He has given His day with all its opportunities to do good and to get good ; His ministry with all its natural and spiritual gifts ; His providence with all its dispensations of mercy and judgment ; His Son with the infinite merit of His atoning blood and His all prevalent and everlasting intercession ; His Spirit with all the infinite resources of His renewing and sanctifying grace. He has thus made infinite provision for the salvation of sinners, and this provision is offered to their acceptance as a free gift. It cannot be said, then, that any one is condemned because of any unwillingness on God's part to save.

We have thus seen that the text does not teach that any one is condemned because of any decree of God excluding him from salvation, although he sincerely desires to obtain that blessing ; nor does it teach that any one is necessarily condemned because he is born with a sinful nature ;

nor because he is a great sinner ; nor because of any unwillingness on God's part to interpose in his behalf. What, then, is the ground of condemnation? "This is the condemnation," this, and not something else ; this, and not anything else, "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

"Light is come into the world." All the light of nature is come into the world. "The heavens declare the glory of God ; the firmament showeth His handiwork." "Day unto day uttereth speech ; night unto night showeth knowledge." "The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood from the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." All this light of nature is come into the world. There is come also all the light of revelation, a light so clear, so pure, so perfect, so sufficient that by its very character it demonstrates that it has come from that divine source whence it claims to have come. And in addition to all this, the light of the Sun of Righteousness is come into the world, revealing all that men need to know and to do in order to be saved ;—all this light has come into the world and shines about men with noontide splendour. And now this is the condemnation ; men love darkness rather than this light ; they love error rather than this truth ; they love to be what

they are rather than to be what this light would make them ; they love to be in the state in which they are rather than to be in the state into which this light would introduce them ; and because they make such a preference as this, so unreasonable and so inexcusable, and stubbornly persist in it, the condemnation of the text rests upon them ; and it is the only ground on which anybody is necessarily condemned, as is evident from the simple fact that if they would receive the light, and walk in it, and do what it points out, all other grounds of condemnation would thereby be escaped.

This rejection of the light has been the fatal sin of the race from the beginning down to the present time. As soon as our first parents sinned, God gave them the light in the first promise, "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," but men loved darkness rather than light, and so by the time of the flood they had so nearly put that light out that it was shining apparently in only one household—the household of Noah—and perhaps was not seen by even all the members of his family. After the flood God again gave the light in clearer form through Abraham, but men still loved darkness rather than light and so by the time of the exodus out of Egypt they had again so nearly put it out that very few seem to have been in possession of it. Again God gave the light in still clearer form

through Moses, but again men loved darkness rather than light, and so by the time of the Saviour's advent they had again so nearly put it out that enough of it did not remain to enable them to see Him with sufficient distinctness to recognize Him, and therefore they rejected Him and put Him to death. Once more God gave the light in still clearer form through the Saviour and His apostles, but once more men loved darkness rather than light, and so by the time the sixth century arrived they had again so nearly extinguished it with their own hands that the "dark ages" began, dark because men had put out the true light, and continued for a thousand years. Thus this has been the fatal sin of men in all ages. The question is often asked why it is that so large a portion of the world is in pagan darkness. One answer is, that as often as God has given the light, men have loved darkness rather than light, and, therefore, have put the light out, and thus involved themselves in the darkness in which we now find them.

We see evidence of the existence of the sin of the text in all heathen lands to which we send our missionaries. We send forth our choice young men and young women, but how difficult do they often find it to make converts, to establish churches, to make conquests for the kingdom. Is it because they do not take the light with them, or is it because they do not hold up the light so

as to be seen by the people? Is it because they cannot make the people see the light; cannot make them see that the light they bring them is better than the darkness in which they now are? No doubt there are many minor obstacles in the way of their success, but the chief obstacle is that there, as everywhere else, men love darkness, even such darkness as they are in, rather than the light.

The same fact is illustrated constantly in all our congregations at home. Why so many services, so many sermons, so many meetings of different kinds, so many efforts, and so small results? Is it because the light is not held up in the view of the people? Is it because they are not made to see it? Is it because they are not made to see that there is a God; that they have sinned against Him; that they are condemned for their sin and lost; that they need a Saviour; that Christ is the Saviour they need;—is it because they are not made to see such truths as these? Do not the great majority of the unconverted acknowledge that they see these truths? Why, then, do they not receive the light? They may make many excuses for themselves and sometimes their Christian friends may make different excuses for them, but the reason at the bottom of all other reasons why they do not receive it is, that they love darkness rather than light.

This, then, is the sin of the ages. This is the ground of condemnation; "light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light." And in view of this truth, I make in conclusion two remarks :

One is that this sin, persevered in, is necessarily fatal. There is but one remedy for sin and that is this light of the text. Of course the sin that rejects that only remedy is fatal.

The other remark is, that since this is the condemnation, we can see how just it is. If when God gives us light, we prefer darkness to that light; if when He gives us the truth, we prefer error to that truth; if when He tells us what is right, we prefer to do that which is wrong; if when He tells us what is wise, we prefer to do what is unwise, and what we know is unwise; if when He tells us what is safe, we prefer to do what is unsafe, and what we know is unsafe; if when He tells us what will save, we prefer to do what we know has no other tendency except to destroy;—if we make such unreasonable and inexcusable preferences as these, and, in spite of all the influences brought to bear on us to abandon them, persist in them, and are, therefore, at last condemned, will not the righteousness of God in our condemnation come forth as the light and His judgment as the noonday, and will not every mouth be stopped and every soul be silent before Him?

VIII

THE WORD OF GOD

“For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—HEB. iv. 12.

IN the previous part of this chapter from which the text is taken, the author announces that there remains a rest for the people of God, and exhorts those to whom he was writing to labour to enter into that rest, and to fear lest a promise being left them of entering in any of them should seem to come short of it. As an encouragement to labour to enter in and as a warning of the consequences that would come upon them if any of them should come short of it, he wrote the words of the text: “For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” These words were an encouragement to labour to enter in because they were an assurance that the word of God being “quick and powerful,” penetrating and stimulating, would mightily aid

them in their efforts. They were a warning of the consequences that would come upon them if they should come short, because they were an announcement that the word of God being sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and being a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, would make its way down into the very depths of their being and detect the sin of which they would be guilty and bring on them whatever penalty they might deserve. Such seems to be the logical setting in which the text is found.

It is not the purpose of this discourse, however, to treat the text in the particular connection in which it is here presented; that is, it is not its purpose to undertake to show how the word of God may be so used as to be an encouragement to labour to enter into the rest here mentioned and as a warning of the consequences that will come on those who may come short of it, but it is rather to point out some of the excellences of God's word, as they are here indicated; excellences that fit it, not only for the particular purpose mentioned in the context, but for all the other great purposes for which it has been given.

I. Let us notice that it is here taught that the word of God is "quick"; that is, it is a living word, the word quick being used here in a

sense now almost obsolete, as in the expression, He is "the Judge of the quick and the dead," meaning He is the Judge of the living and the dead. The word is a living word in several important senses :

1. It is a living word in the sense that it has triumphantly survived all the assaults that have been made upon it. Ever since the book came into existence, it has been assailed. It has been assailed on almost every conceivable ground and in almost every conceivable way. It has been assailed on the ground that God being the Infinite and the Absolute, could not make a verbal revelation of Himself to men, because He would thus come into relation to them and thus cease to be the Infinite and Absolute. It has been assailed on the ground that even if God could make a verbal revelation of Himself to men, this book does not furnish satisfactory evidence that it has had so exalted an origin. It has been assailed on the ground that even if it be a revelation from God, it is not an inspired revelation, and so is not an infallible rule of faith and practice. It has been assailed on the ground that even if it be inspired in some of its parts, as in its doctrinal and devotional parts, it is not inspired in all its parts, as in its poetical and historical parts. It has been assailed on the ground that a number of its books were not written at the dates at which they claim to have been written, nor by the persons whose

names they bear, but were written at much later dates and by persons whose names history has not been sufficiently careful to preserve. On these and on many other grounds the book has been assailed ever since it came into existence. Atheism has assailed it, and Pantheism, and Polytheism, and Deism, and Materialism, and Rationalism, and Agnosticism, and Evolutionism, and a host of other isms. It has been assailed as no other book has ever been ; and yet, although it has been passing through this fierce ordeal for more than eighteen hundred years, it lies before us here this morning in the house of God intact in every part. Not a single book has been discredited ; not a single chapter has been expunged ; not a single important statement or doctrine in it has been successfully called in question. A multitude of as learned and able men as the world has produced, have read it ; they have studied it ; they have analyzed it ; they have weighed it ; they have measured it ; they have sifted it ; they have questioned it ; they have cross-questioned it ; they have subjected it to every test human ingenuity has been able to devise ; for more than eighteen hundred years they have had it in a furnace of criticism heated seven times hotter than that in which any other book was ever placed ; and yet even at this late day it comes forth not only unconsumed, but it may fairly be said without the smell of fire on any part

of it. It is read by more at the present day than ever before ; and is believed by more, and is exerting a mightier influence for good than at any previous period in the world's history. It is a living word then in the sense that it has thus triumphantly survived all the assaults that have ever been made upon it.

2. It is a living word also in the sense that, although it is so old a book (the latest parts having been written more than eighteen hundred years ago), it nevertheless has still a living adaptation to all the living wants of all living men. It was written by men long since dead, primarily for men long since dead. It was written by men in circumstances very different from ours, primarily for men in very different circumstances from ours. As to knowledge, culture, government, institutions, laws, modes of thought and modes of living, they were about as different from ourselves as any people could well be. And yet, although it was thus written, it suits us as well as it suited them. Its teachings suit us as well as they suited them. What do we need to know about God and His law and sin and salvation and duty and life and death, that it does not teach us? Its warnings suit us as well as they suited them. To what dangers are we exposed against which it does not warn us as well as it did them? Its promises suit us as well as they suited them. What blessings of any sort do we

need that it does not promise us as distinctly as it promised them? Its commandments suit us as well as they suited them. What duty is there that we are under any obligation to perform that it does not require? What sin is there that we are in danger of committing that it does not forbid? All its teachings of every sort suit us just as well as they suited them. It is just as "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" for us as it was for them, and can just as certainly "thoroughly furnish us unto every good work," as it could them. It is as good a lamp for our feet and as good a light to our path as it was for theirs, and can just as certainly safely guide us along the straight and narrow path that leads to God's kingdom as it could them. Thus, although the book is so old, it has not in the slightest degree become antiquated. It is as perfectly adapted to all the wants of men in this twentieth century, with all its progress in knowledge and in civilization, as it was to the wants of those who lived amid the severest simplicities of the earliest ages, when men dwelt in tents and watched over their flocks in the fields. And it is the only book in the literature of the world of which this is true. Take any other book as old as this, and what kind of adaptation has it to the wants of men at the present day? Take any other book half as old as this, and what fitness has it to teach men

in any department of knowledge what they now most need to know? In our colleges, universities and other schools it is found necessary every few years to change almost all the books, because the world by its progress in knowledge has got beyond them. But here is a book that in its latest parts is more than eighteen hundred years old, and it is on the most important and difficult subjects the human mind has ever undertaken to treat, and yet it is suitable for all men at the present day as it was for those into whose hands its different parts were originally placed. It is a living book, then, in the sense that although so old, it still has this living adaptation to all the living wants of all living men.

It is true, indeed, that in some of the literature of the day you may have seen intimations that the world by its progress has got beyond this book; that a new religion is now needed; a religion abreast of the progress of the age; and you may have observed that some have gone so far as to undertake to sketch this new religion; to suggest the principles that are to take the place of the old evangelical creeds that the churches have hitherto held. But in what respect has the world by its progress got beyond this book? That the world has made progress no one will deny. That it has made many and important discoveries in every department of knowledge, all intelligent people will admit.

But what discoveries has it made in religion that antiquate and supersede the teachings of this book? Has it discovered a new and better God; a new and better God than He who is a "Spirit infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth"? Has it discovered a new and better Saviour; a new and better Saviour than He "who loved us and gave Himself for us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us kings and priests unto God," and "who is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God by Him"? Has it discovered a new and better law; a new and better law than that law which is holy, just and good and perfect? Has it discovered a new and better way to the kingdom of God; a new and better way than that straight and narrow path of which alone the Scriptures have anything to say? Has it discovered a new and better way of being saved through the Lord Jesus Christ; a new and better way than faith in Him and repentance for sin? Has it discovered anything new and better in regard to the eternal destinies of man? If so, when were these discoveries made, and where, and by whom, and what evidence have we that they are reliable; that we may without any misgivings accept them instead of the teachings of the Bible and rest on them the whole weight of our eternal interests? Who are these modern apostles and prophets

that would supersede the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New? What credentials do they bring us that they come from God and that they speak in His name and by His authority? But if the world has not discovered a new and better God, or Saviour, or law, or way of salvation, or anything else new and better than the Scriptures contain, in what respect has it by its progress got beyond them? The world by its progress got beyond the Bible! Has it ever yet come up to it? Has it ever approximated it? Does the morality of the world at all compare with the morality which it prescribes? What nonsense, then, is this in which men are indulging when they say the world by its progress has got beyond this book! One of the excellences of the book is that although it is so old, although the world has had it in its possession so long, it is so far in advance of any spiritual attainments the world has yet made that it is in all respects as suitable for the world to-day as it was when first written.

3. Still another sense in which it is a living word is that it enters so largely into all the thoughts and activities of the generation to which we belong. Consider for a moment through how many avenues it does this. How many churches there are in the world and how often they are open for religious worship! How many ministers there are in the world and how

often they give instruction out of the Scriptures! How many Sabbath-schools there are in the world, and on how many millions of young minds and hearts the great lessons of the word are inculcated! How many Bibles there are in the world and how wide is their distribution! How much religious literature there is in the world, and how extensively it is read! How many Christian homes there are in the world and how many Christian men and women and how vast is the influence for good which in the grand aggregate they exert! And how through all these different avenues the truths of the book, and the principles of the book, and the influences of the book, make their way into the minds and hearts of millions at the present day in the different parts of the world and what an influence they exert over their thoughts and over their activities! Why, what part of the civilized world is there into which the book has not gone? What throne is there that it has not ascended and with the edicts of which it has not had something to do? What parliament is there into which it has not entered and over the deliberations of which it has not exerted a salutary influence? What congress is there into which it has not made its way and whose legislation it has not had something to do with shaping? When that international council met recently to mitigate the horrors of war and to devise means

for bringing it to an end, what book had more to do with bringing it together than any other book; than all other books put together? It is thus a living book because it enters so largely into all the thoughts and activities of this age in which we live.

II. The text teaches that the word of God is not only quick, but "powerful." How powerful the word of God is we have many illustrations. It required great power to bring this universe into existence out of nothing. But such is the power of God's word that He "spake, and it was done." He uttered His voice, and instantly there came trooping into existence out of the infinite void of nothingness this world and all the other worlds we see in the fields of space above us. Since the universe was thus brought into existence, it has required great power to keep it in existence, every sun and moon and star in its appointed place and all its laws in harmonious operation and coöperation. Yet, it is said, all things are upheld by the word—the word of His power. It will require great power to bring this revolted world back from its distant and disastrous wanderings, every kingdom into subjection to His kingdom and every will into subjection to His will. Yet we are told that the sole means God will use for this purpose is His word; His word read; His word proclaimed and illustrated in the characters and lives of His people. When

the end of all things shall come, it will require great power to awake the innumerable millions of the dead out of their long sleep and to gather them at the judgment seat of Christ. Yet we are taught that when the trump of God shall sound and the voice of the Son of God shall be heard, "in a moment," "in the twinkling of an eye," all these tremendous events shall take place. So much power has the word of God! But these Scriptures are the word of God as truly as that was His word that called the universe into existence and as that shall be His word that shall at last call the dead forth out of their graves, and it shall as certainly accomplish all the great ends it has in view. It contains a number of prophecies in regard to the future, as in regard to the coming of the Saviour's kingdom. What power is there anywhere that can prevent the fulfillment of those prophecies? It makes many promises of blessing to God's people. What power is there anywhere that can prevent the redemption of those promises? It pronounces many threatenings against those who "obey not the Gospel of God." What power is there anywhere that can prevent the execution of those threatenings? It undertakes to take this rebellious world captive and to bring it into hearty subjection to Him whose right it is to reign. What power is there in the universe that can prevent the accomplishment of

that glorious result? Thus the word of God has so much power that it is going on down through the ages irresistibly accomplishing all that it undertakes, fulfilling every prophecy, redeeming every promise, executing every threatening, and gradually, but surely, conquering this world for Christ. It not only has power, but it has almighty power in the sense that almighty power stands behind every prophecy to fulfill it, and behind every promise to redeem it, and behind every threatening to execute it, and behind everything else it undertakes to do, to accomplish it. No weapon formed against it, therefore, can ever prosper. No assault made upon it can ever succeed. The individuals, or even the nations, that throw themselves across the path of its onward movement in the world only thereby invite and insure their own destruction. Thus is the word of God "powerful."

III. The word of God is not only "quick and powerful," but, the text declares, it is "sharper than any two-edged sword"; that is, it is not only a living word and a powerful word, but it has an edge, and that edge is sharp, and with that edge it cuts. Who has not felt the edge of its great truths? When we have received them, and yielded ourselves up to them, and allowed them to do with us what they would, what thorough moral and spiritual surgery at once began! Wrong habits, how were they

lopped off! Evil indulgences, how were they cut away! Sinful desires and appetites and passions, how were they pursued down into the very depths of our soul and out in their widest ramifications, and how the surgery, if we consented to it, went on and on until they were completely extirpated! How does it pare and trim; probe and cut until the whole cancerous growth of sin that has fastened itself on our hearts has been uprooted and cast away! Thus, with an edge sharper than any sword and with a skill that human science cannot rival, it cuts and cuts until every trace of the dreadful malady of sin is removed from the soul and it is presented "faultless before the presence of His glory."

Not only, however, has the word of God one edge, but it has two edges. It is like a "two-edged sword"; and both these edges are sharp, and with both these edges it cuts. With one edge it cuts to save; with the other edge it cuts to destroy. With one edge it cuts to cure; with the other edge it cuts to kill. With one edge it cuts as the benevolent surgeon cuts; with the other edge it cuts as the penal executioner cuts. With one edge it so cuts that it is a "savour of life unto life"; with the other edge it so cuts that it is a "savour of death unto death." Just as the laws of this commonwealth are such that if we obey them they preserve us, but if we disobey them they destroy us, so the word of God is

such that if we receive it, it will minister life; but if we reject it, it will inflict death; and this double operation of the word is constantly going on in the congregations that assemble to hear it, and it is this fact that makes the preaching and hearing of the word such solemn work. Because of this fact, no one ever leaves the house of God as he came to it. He is better or he is worse. His heart is softer or it is harder. He is nearer the kingdom or he is farther away from it. If Paul had this fact in view in reference to preaching, no wonder he exclaimed, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who can preach with the sincerity and earnestness; with the eloquence and power by which he ought to be characterized when preaching is followed by such results?

IV. The text teaches that the word of God is not only quick and powerful and that it not only has these two edges that are sharp and with which it cuts, but that it has also a point, and that that point is sharp, and that with that point it pierces; "pierces even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;" that is, it pierces down through all obstructions into the depths of the soul and detects and reveals all its activities. It pierces down to the depths of the understanding and reveals the character of its thoughts; down

to the depths of the conscience, and reveals the character of its judgments ; down to the depths of the heart, and reveals the character of its emotions ; down to the depths of the will, and reveals the character of its volitions ; down to the depths of the soul, and reveals the character of all its exercises. It thus reveals man to himself as he is, so that he sees himself as God sees him, and so sees somewhat as he should his need of the great salvation God has provided for him.

Such are some of the excellences of the word as taught in the text ; and now in view of them, I make two remarks in conclusion :

One is, whence must a book that has such excellences have come? Whence its vitality that has survived all the assaults that have ever been made upon it? Whence its power by which it accomplishes everything it undertakes? Whence its moral surgery that, if submitted to, would deliver men from every trace of sin? Whence its penetrating and revealing power that enables men to see themselves just as they are, as no other book does, except as it has learned how to do it from it? How has it come to pass that men, taken almost all of them from the humblest classes of human society, wrote such a book as this? Why did not Socrates write it, or Plato, or Aristotle? The explanation the authors give of the origin of the book is very satisfactory. They give it a divine origin. Is there any other

explanation that half so satisfactorily accounts for all the facts in the case? Is there any other explanation that accounts for many of the facts at all?

The other remark is that since the book possesses these divine excellences it ought to be read and studied. What reason can be given for reading any book that is not an infinitely better reason for reading this book? Do you read a book because its author is great? The author of this book is infinitely great. Do you read because so many others read it and because you do not like to be ignorant of a book with which so many others are acquainted? What book is read by half so many as this book is? Do you read a book because it has so prominent a place in human literature? What book has half so prominent a place as this? Do you read a book because of the important information it contains? What book contains information half so important as is contained in this book? Do you read a book because of the good it can do you? What book can do you half so much good as this book? Do you read a book because you need it to fit you for the duties and events of the future? What book is half so necessary for you for that purpose as this book? What reason, then, can any one give for reading any book that is not an infinitely better reason for reading this book?

IX

THE CHRISTIAN'S HERITAGE

“For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's.”—1 COR. iii. 21-23.

THE church of Corinth was divided into religious parties. Some said they were of Paul; others that they were of Apollos, and still others that they were of Cephas; and as is always the result in such circumstances there were debate, strife, confusion and disorder to such an extent as provoke the apostle's censure. These parties seem to have originated in erroneous views of the Christian ministry. These Corinthians seem to have thought that they were not only under great obligations to the ministers who had brought them to a knowledge of the truth, which, of course, was true, but they seem to have regarded them as to some extent party leaders and as rivals one of another, and seem to have regarded it as their duty to follow respectively the particular ministers who had been the means of their conversion. They seem, indeed, to have imagined that they in some sense belonged to

them. The apostle corrects their mistake. He tells them that instead of belonging to their ministers, their ministers belong to them; not only so, but that everything else belongs to them also. "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." Of course what was thus true of them, is equally true of all other Christians, and so of ourselves. We have here, then, an inspired inventory of the blessings God bestows on all His people, and the object of this discourse is to give some glimpse of the items contained in it.

I. The text teaches that Paul and Apollos and Cephas are ours; that is, that the ministry of the Church—of the whole Church—is ours to the full extent that we have any opportunity to derive spiritual benefit from its ministrations. It has been raised up, and qualified with natural and spiritual gifts, and called by the Spirit, and sent forth into the world to minister to our spiritual wants. It is remarkable, when we come to consider the subject, to how great an extent the ministry of the whole Church is ours. It is remarkable to how great an extent the ministry of the past has been made our ministry. One and two hundred years ago ministers were given to the Church to be our ministers, for we have read more or less

of the writings of such ministers as Howe, Owen, Bunyan, Doddridge, Flavel and a number of others, and have received spiritual benefit, and thus they are as truly our ministers as they were the ministers of the particular generations to which they respectively belonged. Not only were ministers given to the Church one and two hundred years ago to be our ministers, but more than eighteen hundred years ago some of the very ministers mentioned in the text were given to the Church to be our ministers, for we have read the writings of Paul and Peter in the New Testament Scriptures with great spiritual profit; and, indeed, still longer ago than in this case, were ministers given to the Church to be our ministers, for we have read with spiritual advantage the writings of Moses and David and all the prophets. Thus to so great extent as this is the ministry of the past our ministry. To a greater extent is the ministry of the present our ministry. No doubt there are a number of ministers in foreign countries, whose faces we have never seen and whose voices we have never heard, who are our ministers because of the ministrations they have made to us by their contributions to the religious literature of the day; and no doubt the same is true as to many ministers in other denominations than our own. To so great extent, then, is the ministry of the Church our ministry; the ministry of the past as well as the

ministry of the present; the ministry of other countries as well as the ministry of our own country; the ministry of other denominations as well as the ministry of our own denomination. This is the first item of blessing in this inventory, and it is an item of no small importance, for what greater service can men render us than so to bring to bear upon us the great truths of divine revelation as that they accomplish in us the saving results for which they are intended?

II. The text teaches that the world is ours; this material world in which we now live. Of course it is not meant that it is ours in the sense that we as God's people have actual and exclusive possession of it. We know that that is not true. Nor is it meant that it is ours in the sense that as God's people we alone have a title to it by divine grant, of which we have been deprived by the unscriptural legislation of men. Some have held some such view, but it has no divine warrant. But it is ours in the sense that we shall receive from it all we need to enable us to fulfill in the world the mission on which we are sent. This the Scriptures plainly teach. When our Saviour was on earth He observed that His disciples did not realize that the world was theirs, and that, therefore, they were constantly agitating in their minds the great questions "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" How

shall we make provision for the temporal wants of ourselves and those dependent on us, and having made it, how shall we preserve it amid all those vicissitudes of earthly fortune to which we are so constantly subjected? He saw that such questions as these were constantly disturbing and distressing their minds and hearts, and, therefore, in one of His most beautiful discourses He not only told them that there was no occasion for such anxiety on their part about their temporal interests, but He did what He seldom condescended to do, He undertook to prove to them that there was no occasion for such anxiety. "Why," said He, "do you take thought for your lives, what you shall eat and for your bodies, what you shall put on? Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?" That is, is not the life a greater, a more important blessing than the food necessary to sustain life? Is not the body a greater, a more important blessing than the raiment necessary to clothe the body? If, then, God is willing to bestow the greater blessing, must He not be willing to bestow the less? If He is willing to give life, is He not willing to give the food necessary to sustain life? If He is willing to give bodies, is He not willing to give the raiment necessary to clothe those bodies? The argument, you observe, is from the greater to the less, one of the most conclusive of all kinds

of argument. If a friend is willing to give us a pound is he not willing to give us a penny? If he is willing to give us a fortune, is he not willing to give us a farthing? If then God is willing to give us the greater blessing of life, is He not willing to give us the lesser blessings necessary to sustain that life? Thus did the Saviour undertake to prove to His disciples that the world was theirs in such a sense, and to such an extent, that there was no occasion for the concern about their temporal interests by which they were characterized. But to make the proof more conclusive and satisfactory, He continued: "Behold the fowls of the air," these birds flying in and out of the branches of these trees above our heads. "They sow not, neither do they reap; nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?" Are not ye who have immortal souls; are not ye who are the children of God, much higher in the scale of being than they are? Are not ye of much more value in God's sight? If then He feeds them, will He not also feed you? If He feeds His birds, will He not feed His children? "If," as good Mathew Henry expressed it, "He feeds the fowls of heaven, will He not feed the heirs of heaven?" Could any argument be more conclusive than that? But so much did the Saviour desire to fix in the minds of His disciples the truth that the world

was theirs in such a sense that they need not have painful anxiety about their temporal welfare, that He pursues His argument still farther : " Consider the lilies of the field how they grow ;" these flowers that are blooming so beautifully about our feet. " They toil not, neither do they spin ; yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, oh, ye of little faith ?" If God thinks so little of raiment as thus so gorgeously to clothe the lily which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, when it is necessary only as a matter of ornament, will He think so much of it as to refuse it to His own children, when it is necessary for their comfort and even for their existence ? " Wherefore," He concludes, " say not what shall we eat and what shall we drink and wherewithal shall we be clothed, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things," implying that because He knows it, He makes suitable provision for these wants, " but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." It was so certain, He said, that there was no occasion for any anxious thought about the morrow. So elaborately and so clearly did the Saviour teach that the world was His

disciples' to the full extent that they needed it to do in the world what He had given them to do.

The same truth is taught in the Old Testament. David, for instance, in one of his Psalms, says, "I have been young and now I am old, yet have I never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread." He not only had never seen the righteous begging bread, but he had never seen even the seed of the righteous begging bread. He does not say it had never occurred. He only says that he had never seen it; and I suppose very few have ever seen it. If the history of those who in our towns and cities go from door to door begging bread could be accurately ascertained, it would probably be found that in very few instances, if in any, they were either the righteous or the seed of the righteous.

Of course when it is thus taught that the world is ours as the people of God, it is not meant that it is ours in any such sense as exempts us from labour, for ordinarily it is only through "diligence in business" that He supplies our temporal wants. Nor is it meant that God's people may not be poor, or become poor; but it is meant, and it is a great deal in this uncertain world, it is meant that the world is ours to the full extent that is consistent with the successful working out of the great problem of our salvation, and that is all that any Christian can reasonably desire.

But there is another sense in which the world is ours. It is ours in the sense that all its events, of whatever sort they may be, work together for our good. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. viii. 28). It is true, indeed, that we cannot in many cases see how they do it, but that ought not to cause us in the slightest degree to doubt the fact. We have no doubt stood in the presence of some huge machine, and as we have looked upon its numerous parts, its plates, and rods, and screws and wheels, some wheels large and some small; some moving in one direction and others in another; some moving rapidly, others moving slowly; some accomplishing one purpose and others accomplishing no purpose at all, so far as we could see;—as we have thus looked upon its numerous parts we have realized our utter inability to see how they were all working together for the accomplishment of one end; yet such was the fact. So, as we stand amid the multitude of the events of our lives; some of one kind; some of another; some favourable, some apparently unfavourable; some adapted to do us good, and others having no adaptation at all so far as we can see, except to harm and destroy; as we stand amid this confused scene of human events, we are profoundly conscious of our utter incompetency to see how they are all working together for our good; yet the fact is,

if we be the children of God, that there is amongst all these events a profounder concert of movement for the accomplishment of our good than was ever secured by human ingenuity in any mechanism for the purpose for which it was intended. The world is ours, then, in the important sense that all its events of every sort, in so far as they affect us individually, "work together for our good."

But there is a wider sense in which this teaching is to be understood. Not only is it true that all the events of the world work together for the good of God's people as individuals, but they work together for their good as a body; they work together for their good as the Church, the kingdom of Christ. This truth would often minister much comfort and hope if it were received and remembered. Sometimes when "pestilence walks in darkness and destruction wastes at noonday," and multitudes are being swept into untimely graves; sometimes "when the heavens are brass and the earth iron, and there is no fruit in the vine nor herd in the stall," and thousands are perishing from hunger; sometimes when nation rises up against nation and great armies are marching to the field of battle; when kingdoms are falling and kingdoms are rising, and thrones are toppling into the dust; when the world presents a scene of strife and bloodshed and of "confusion worse confounded,"

we are apt to imagine that all these things are against the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and that they are delaying its coming, and we are gloomy and despondent, when the fact is that all these events are but the agitations, the convulsions, the revolutions, the turnings and the overturnings by which the providence of God is bringing about the establishment of His kingdom whose right it is to reign, and perhaps that kingdom is sometimes never coming more rapidly than just when to us it does not seem to be coming at all. Christ is "head over all things to the Church," and therefore causes every dispensation of providence as well as every ministration of grace to make the largest possible contribution to the success of the work in which it is engaged.

In all these senses, then, the world is ours; and we should antecedently have expected it to be ours in all these senses; for "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" If He gives us the greatest of all gifts because we need Him, will He not with Him give us all lesser gifts to the full extent that we need them?

III. The text teaches that life is ours, this life that we are now living. Of course the apostle does not mean simply that it is ours in the sense that we are now living it. That would

be too bald a truism for him to record. But he means that it is ours in the sense that it is for our benefit and in the sense also that we have a title to it ; a title of the same sort as that we have to the life to come. Christ has taken our place under the law. He has met all its claims in our behalf ; all the claims of its precepts for obedience and all the claims of its penalty for satisfaction, and He has thus wrought out for us a perfect legal righteousness, and when we receive Him as our Saviour He makes that righteousness over to us ; He invests us with it ; He makes it our righteousness, as truly as if we had wrought it out for ourselves, and by that righteousness we are justified in His sight, and thus we have a righteousness to justify us better than that the angels have, for they have only their own righteousness to justify them, which because it is only their own, is a finite righteousness, while we have to justify us the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, which because it is His, is an infinite righteousness. This righteousness entitles us to everything we need ; entitles us to all the life we need ; to the life of this world and to the life of the world to come. Life is ours, then, in the sense that we have this title to it, purchased for us by the Saviour ; and, therefore, we shall have all of it that we need to do in the world the work God has given us to do. How much do we need for that purpose? Do we

need ten years? We shall have that. Do we need twenty years? We shall have that. Do we need fifty years or even so much as a hundred years? We shall have every hour and moment of it. During the Civil War in this country it is said that Stonewall Jackson was sometimes remonstrated with by his subordinate officers for the way he exposed himself on the battle-field, and that he replied in substance that he had duties to perform in connection with that service, and that so long as those duties continued, and so long as he, in exposing himself, was only in the performance of those duties, he was as safe amid the perils of the battle-field as he would be in his quiet home in Lexington; that he was immortal until his work was done. The same is true of every child of God.

IV. The text teaches that death is ours; ours in the sense that it is no longer an enemy but a friend; in the sense that it can no longer do us harm, but only good and an infinite measure of it. What harm can death do Christians? It may separate us, indeed, from all our earthly possessions, but it only thus introduces us into "the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away." It may separate us from our earthly pleasures, but it only thus introduces us into "the peace that passeth all understanding and into the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory." It may separate us from all

our earthly honours, but it only thus introduces us into "the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It may separate us from all our earthly friends, but it only thus introduces us to "the innumerable company of the angels"; to "the general assembly and church of the first-born"; to "the spirits of the just made perfect"; and to all the loved ones gone before. It may separate us from all that is earthly, but it only thus introduces us to all that is heavenly. In short, death is only the servant of the Christian who stands at the end of his earthly pilgrimage and waits until God gives the signal from heaven, when he throws wide open the door through which the Christian passes up the shining palace stairs that lead into his Father's house. Death is ours, then, in the sense that it can do us no harm, but only infinite good.

But it is ours also in the sense that we are given the victory over it. How often is it true that in their last moments, if disease leaves them in possession of their faculties, they are enabled to say, "O death, where is thy sting?" "I have always imagined that thou wert a hideous monster of some sort, armed with a dreadful sting, with which thou wouldst at last inflict on me intolerable anguish; but where is thy sting? I see it not. I feel it not. I can cheerfully bear all that I am now enduring in submission to my Master's will." "O grave, where is thy

victory?" "I have always thought that I would at last come trembling and cowering into thy presence like a poor, timid, affrighted serf into the presence of a cruel tyrant, and that through my fears of thee thou wouldst completely triumph over me; but where is thy victory?" Why, I can lie down in thee and rest and sleep and wait until the morning of the resurrection as calmly and as willingly as I ever lay down on my bed after the weary labours of the day and rested and slept and waited for the dawning of the coming day. 'Thanks be unto God who giveth me the victory;' who does not give death and the grave the victory over me, but who giveth me the victory over them!" How often do God's people thus triumph in this last conflict! Death is ours, then, in the sense that it has itself been put to death, and the grave has been buried. As a single illustration of this truth, a friend told me not long since of a young lady who even when in health was so much afraid of death that it was a source of distress to her friends; but later when she became ill and death was at hand, she asked to be propped up in her bed, and then to their surprise and joy she sang:

"Jesus can make a dying bed
 Feel soft as downy pillows are,
 While on His breast I lean my head,
 And breathe my life out sweetly there."

V. The text teaches that "things present" are ours; as if the apostle had said, "I have already told you that the ministry of the Church is ours, and that the world is ours, and that life and death are ours; and now if there be anything that is not included in these comprehensive statements; if anybody can conceive of anything desirable that is not included in them, let him know that that is ours also, and that it is as entirely ours as the ministry and the world and life and death. All things are ours." And not only are all things present ours, but all things to come are ours also. All the glorious things to come are ours. There is a glorious kingdom to come, and that is ours. There is "glory and honour and immortality" to come, and that is ours. There is to come "what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive," and that is ours. There is to come "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and that is ours. There is to come all that infinite love can prompt, and infinite wisdom devise, and infinite power and grace confer, and that is ours. Such is the astonishing inventory of blessings that God bestows on His people.

But now a great fact like this must have a great explanation, and the apostle, in the next place, tells us what that explanation is. One reason that all things are thus ours is that we are

Christ's. We are His in a number of different senses. We are His by creation. "By Him were all things made, and without Him was not anything made that was made." We are His by re-creation. He makes us new creatures in Himself so that old things pass away and all things become new. We are His by redemption. We have been bought, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot. We are His by consecration. If we are His at all, we have presented to Him our bodies and our souls, all that we are and all that we have, living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto Him, which is our reasonable service. We are His by virtue of a mysterious spiritual union with Him; we are members of the spiritual body of which He is the head; we are in Him and He is in us. Thus in a number of senses we are His, and this is one reason why all things are ours.

The other reason why all things are ours is that Christ is God's. He is God's Son and God's heir, and as His heir, all things that are God's are His. But all things are God's, and therefore all things are His; and since we are His and He is ours, all things are ours.

Such seems to be the teaching of the text. What more could God do for us that He has not done? What responses shall we make to Him for such goodness as this? Shall not our

hearts always be full of gratitude, and our lips always full of praise, and our hands always full of service? Shall we not lay ourselves as sacrifices on His altars to be consumed in His service? Shall we think anything too much to do for Him? Why, if we could do all that an angel can do, would it not be a feeble response for such blessings? If we could do all that all the angels together can do, would it not be an inadequate response? Shall we not, then, in humble dependence on divine grace, retire from the sanctuary to-day, fully resolved to do for Him in the future in every way all for which He gives us the ability and opportunity?

X

THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY SAVED

“If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”—1 PET. iv. 18.

BY the righteous in the text are meant all true Christians. They are called the righteous for at least two reasons. One is that they have been born again of the Spirit, and have thus been brought prevalently under the control of righteous principles. It is not meant that they have been entirely delivered from sin and made perfectly holy. That has never in this world been true of any of the Lord's people. It was not true of Abraham, the father of the faithful. It was not true of Moses, whom God honoured as He has honoured no other individual of the race. It was not true of any of the prophets, nor of any of the apostles. It was not true even of the Apostle Paul. Although he made so high attainments in the Christian life; although he was the chief of the apostles; although he rendered to the Lord a service that has not been equalled by any other disciple under the new dispensation; although on one occasion he was caught up into Paradise, into the third heavens, whether in the body or out of

the body he could not tell, and heard and saw what was so glorious that when he returned to the earth he found human speech an incompetent vehicle with which to communicate it to men, and although he could say, "I have fought the good fight; and I have finished the course; I have kept the faith;" although all this was true of him, he was nevertheless constrained to say, "I count not myself to have apprehended," but "this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth to the things that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." When, then, Christians are called the righteous, it is not meant that they are entirely delivered from sin and are perfectly righteous, but it is meant that they love righteousness, and that they seek after righteousness, and that they are prevalently under the control of righteous principles.

The other sense in which they are called the righteous is that the legal righteousness of Christ has been imputed to them and been received by their faith. He has taken their place under the law and has met all its claims in their behalf; all the claims of its precepts for obedience and all the claims of its penalties for satisfaction, and has thus wrought out for them a perfect legal righteousness, and when they receive Him as their Saviour, He makes that righteousness over to them; He sets it down to their account; He

makes it their righteousness ; as truly theirs as if they had wrought it out for themselves, and by that righteousness they are justified in God's sight ; and, therefore, are called the righteous.

In these two senses, then, they are called the righteous : they are prevalently under the control of righteous principles and have had imputed to them the legal righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By the ungodly and the sinner in the text is meant, not simply great transgressors of the law ; the profane, the licentious, those whose "sins are as scarlet and red like crimson," but also all who have never repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how refined and amiable and moral they may be. They are called ungodly because they are living without God in the world ; without love to Him ; without obedience to His law and without consecration to His service ; and they are called sinners because, in refusing to repent of their sins and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they are refusing to do that on which God most insists ; on which He most insists, because until they do those two things they cannot acceptably do anything else He demands at their hands.

I have made these simple explanations in introducing this discourse that we may see that the apostle is not here talking about classes of men to which we do not belong, and therefore

have no interest in what he is here saying ; but that we may see that he is talking about classes of men to the one or the other of which every one of us belongs, and that, therefore, every one of us has as profound an interest in what he is here saying as those had to whom the language was originally addressed. Let us, therefore, seriously consider the solemn question which the apostle here propounds : "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" that is, where shall they appear in that day when the eternal destinies of men are to be fixed? Evidently this is one of those questions which rhetoricians call a rhetorical question. That is, it is not a question asked for information, as if the apostle thought somebody else might know what he did not know, how the ungodly and the sinner might be saved, although even the righteous were saved with much difficulty, but it is a question that carries its answer on its very face, and is, therefore, a form of emphatic and solemn assertion, and the meaning is, "if the righteous are scarcely saved ;" are saved only with great difficulty, of course the ungodly and the sinner in that day will not be saved at all. We have a similar assertion, with a somewhat similar meaning, in the preceding verse : "For the time is come," says the apostle, "when judgment must begin at the house of God ; and if it first begin at us,

what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" To see the meaning of that question, it is necessary to remember that when God is about to inflict judgments on men for sins in which His own people have taken part, His rule is to begin, in the infliction of those judgments, with His own people, because they have had more light and are less excusable. Accordingly on one occasion under the Old Testament dispensation He announced that He was about to inflict judgments for idolatry, and that He would begin with the city that was called by His name. On another occasion He made a similar announcement, and declared that He would begin, not only with the city that was called by His own name, but with the sanctuary in which His name was written and in which His honour dwelt. When, then, the apostle here says that judgment must begin at the house of God, he means that it is utterly in vain for those who obey not the Gospel of God to hope to escape. And similar is the meaning of the text. If even the righteous are saved with great difficulty, of course the ungodly and the sinner in that day will be condemned.

Such seems to be the connection in which the text is found. In treating the text, I shall endeavour, in the first place, to show that the righteous are saved with great difficulty.

I. It was a difficult thing to provide a plan

of salvation for the righteous. It may safely be said to have been the most difficult thing God ever undertook to do. It taxed the infinite attributes of His nature as no other work of His hands has ever done. It seems to us to have been a very difficult thing to create the universe out of nothing ; but for Him that was perfectly easy. "He spake, and it was done ;" and just as easily He could have repeated the wondrous achievement. Every moment to all eternity He might have brought into existence a system of worlds as vast and glorious as this. But while by a word He could thus speak the universe into existence, by no word that even He could utter could He speak sin out of existence. If He could have got rid of sin by as easy a process as that by which He created the world, it is inconceivable that He would have resorted to the infinitely costly expedient of the sacrifice of the blood and life of His own coequal and coeternal Son. It is a very easy thing to do wrong ; little children can do it ; but God alone can undo it, and even He can undo it only at the infinite expense He has already incurred.

One reason why it was a difficult thing to provide a plan of salvation for the righteous was found in the law. God had given men a law ; that law was a transcript of His own perfections, holy and just and good, and to that law He had attached appropriate penalties, and those penalties

He had pledged Himself to execute; and the order of His government, and the dignity of His throne, and the best interests of His creatures, and the truth of His word, and the glory of His name demanded that those penalties should be executed, for of what account is a law if it be not enforced, and how can it be enforced unless its penalties are inflicted on those who violate it? But that law man violated inexcusably. How, then, could he be saved? How was it possible to save him from the penalty of the law, and yet, at the same time, to secure that reverence for the law, and that obedience to its requirements, and that condemnation of sin and that regard for holiness on which the welfare of the divine government and the highest interests of men were so dependent? Plainly here was a great difficulty in the way of such a plan of salvation as man needed; a difficulty so formidable that no finite mind could have shown how it might be surmounted. What lawyer can show how in human governments law can be upheld, and justice maintained, and order preserved, and crime appropriately rebuked and punished, unless the penalties of law are inflicted on transgressors? One difficulty, then, in the way of providing a plan of salvation was found in the law and that difficulty was so great that no finite intelligence could have seen how it could be removed.

Another difficulty was found in the fact that when man fell, there was then, as matters then stood, no being in the universe competent to effect his salvation. In order that he might be saved two things were necessary: the law must be perfectly obeyed and its penalty must be suffered. But there was then no being anywhere who could fulfill the one condition or the other. There was no being who could obey the law. Man could not do it for himself, for he had already violated it. No angel could do it for him, for every angel had all he could do to meet his own obligations to the law. God the Son as God and in His divine nature could not come down and place Himself under the law and perform the purely human duties which the law required, because He was not then human. Thus there was no being, as matters then were, who could fulfill the first condition on which man's salvation was dependent. Nor was there any being who could fulfill the other condition, suffer the penalty of the law. Man could not do it, and survive that penalty, for that penalty was not only death, but eternal death. No angel could suffer that penalty for him because the suffering of no angel would have possessed sufficient merit to make atonement for the sins of the whole human race; and God the Son, as God, and in His divine nature, could not do it, because as God and in His divine nature, He

was incapable of suffering. Thus when man fell in the garden of Eden, it was so difficult to provide a plan of salvation for him that there was then nowhere in all God's wide dominion a single being, as matters then stood, competent to fulfill the conditions on which his salvation was dependent. Before he could be saved, it was necessary, in a most important sense, that God should exercise His almighty power in creating a Saviour for him. That is, it was necessary that the divine nature of the Son be united to a human nature, and that thus a being, the most wonderful of all beings, should be brought into existence; a being so wonderful that He was at the same moment both divine and human, both infinite and finite, both Creator and creature; both God and man, both immortal and mortal; both incapable of suffering and capable of suffering the death of the cross. It was necessary that such a Saviour as this should be provided before man could be saved. Then, however, the problem was perfectly solved; for while God the Son as God and in His divine nature could not come down under the law and perform the purely human duties which the law required, because He was not human, He could do it after He had become human, and while as God and in His divine nature He could not come under and suffer the penalty of the law, being incapable of suffering, He could do it after

He had become a man ; and the divine nature united with the human gave to both the obedience and suffering merit sufficient to meet all claims of law against the race. Thus it is seen that the righteous are saved with great difficulty in the sense that it was so difficult to provide a plan of salvation.

II. The righteous are saved with great difficulty in the sense that even after a plan of salvation has been devised, it is very difficult successfully to apply it to the minds and hearts of men. It is so difficult that it cannot be done by any human agency. In order that men may be saved, even after a plan of salvation has been devised, they must be convinced of sin, but that cannot be accomplished by any human agency. Even the Apostle Paul said that all that he could do was to plant the seed of divine truth in the minds of men ; that all Apollos, the eloquent orator, could do was to water it ; to furnish some of the conditions of its growth, and that God Himself must give the increase ; that He alone could cause the seed to germinate and grow. In order that men may be saved after a plan of salvation has been devised, they must not only be convinced of sin, but they must be made new creatures in Christ Jesus ; they must be re-created. But it requires as much power to re-create them in this second instance as it did to create them in the first instance. But it required almighty power to create

them in the first instance, and, therefore, it requires almighty power to re-create them in this second instance. Thus, even after a plan of salvation has been provided, it requires almighty power successfully to apply it in a single instance. In order that men may be saved, after a plan of salvation has been provided, they must also be raised from death to life; from spiritual death to spiritual life, for they are "dead in trespasses and in sins." But it is a very difficult thing to restore to life anything that is dead. Here is a dead leaf. Who can restore to it its lost principle of vegetable life? Here is a dead insect of the simplest possible structure. Who can restore to it its lost principle of animal life? Here is a dead human body. The heart has ceased to throb; the pulse has ceased to beat; the brow has become a cold, white blank; the brightness of life has faded out of the eyes; the bloom of life has faded off the cheeks; the blood is cold and clotted in the veins; the muscles and limbs are rigid and motionless and decomposition has set in. Who can summon back its lost principle of physical life? Who can cause that heart again to throb; that pulse again to beat? Who can rekindle in those eyes their wonted fires and repaint those cheeks with the glow of health; and cause that cold clotted blood to flow warm again in those veins? Who can so infuse life again into every part of that dead body that it shall

spring up and stand and move about amongst us with the vigour and activity that once characterized it? How impossible is this to human agency! But if men cannot restore a dead human body to life, nor a dead insect, nor even a dead leaf, how impossible is it for them to restore to life a dead soul, especially when spiritual death is the lowest and worst form of death and spiritual life is the highest and most glorious form of life? The righteous, then, are saved with great difficulty in the sense that, even after a plan of salvation has been devised, it requires almighty power and grace successfully to apply it to a single soul.

III. The righteous are saved with great difficulty in the sense that it is not only difficult to provide a plan of salvation and to apply it, but even after it has been applied, and men have been brought into a state of salvation, it is very difficult to keep them in it. The history of the Israelites in the wilderness, as they passed on to the land promised them, has ever been regarded as a type of the history of God's people as they pass through this world to their heavenly rest. But how much patience did it require on God's part to bear for forty years with the "evil manners" of the Israelites in the wilderness? At Mount Sinai, for instance, He gave them the law out of the midst of clouds and darkness, thunders and lightnings and earthquakes and in that law

He most solemnly forbade the sin of idolatry, and yet at the foot of that very mountain only a few days after, while those lightnings were, as it were, still flashing before their eyes and those thunders still rolling in their ears and the earth still quaking beneath their feet, they did the very thing He had so distinctly and solemnly commanded them not to do—they worshipped Him under the similitude of an ox that eateth grass! How much patience did it require on God's part to bear with that! He gave them the most conclusive evidence of His interest in them and of His willingness to minister to all their wants. In the mighty miracles He wrought in their behalf in Egypt by which the Egyptians were at last prevailed on to let them go; in cleaving asunder the waters of the sea and in rolling them up into liquid walls on either hand and in holding them there until the vast multitude passed over in safety to the farther shore; in giving them food from heaven every day to appease their hunger and water out of the flinty rock to quench their thirst; in going before them every day in the pillar of cloud and every night in the pillar of fire; in these and in many other ways He demonstrated to them His purpose to provide for them and to take care of them; and yet how often did they murmur and complain; how did they openly express their regret that He had ever brought them up out of Egypt and their desire to

return thither, thus publicly declaring that they would rather have the bondage of Egypt than to have the liberty wherewith He had set them free ; that they would rather be under the taskmasters of Egypt than to be subject to that authority which He was then exercising over them ! How much patience did it require on God's part to bear with such conduct as that on their part ! How may we well wonder that some thunderbolt " red hot with uncommon wrath " did not at once blot them out of existence ! He gave them every reason why they should trust in Him ; why they should trust in His goodness to provide for them and in His power to protect them and in His faithfulness to conduct them successfully into the land He had so long promised them ; and yet, when they arrived on the borders of that country and were commanded to enter in, with every assurance of success, they almost unanimously refused because they did not believe what He said ! What could be more taxing to His patience than that ? He warned them against the perils to which they exposed themselves by violating His laws and disregarding His authority, inflicting on them the heaviest judgments of His hands, causing the earth on one occasion to open and swallow a number of them up ; and yet the cleft earth had hardly closed on its shrieking victims before they violated His laws again and trampled on His authority afresh.

Thus we see what patience and love and mercy it required on God's part to bear for forty years with the evil manners of His people in the wilderness. Indeed, He was sometimes on the very point of giving them up and leaving them to the fate they so richly deserved. And yet, my dear Christian friends, if we could see our sins as we see theirs; if we could see our idolatry, and our murmuring and complaining, and our unbelief, and our sins of other kinds in all their aggravations as distinctly as we see theirs as depicted by the pen of inspiration, we should probably see that it has required as much patience and love and mercy to bear with us as it did to bear with them. The righteous are saved with difficulty, then, in the sense that even when they are brought into a state of salvation, it is very difficult to keep them in it.

Thus far, however, we have been looking at the subject from the divine side. It is equally plain that the righteous are saved with difficulty when we come to look at it from the human side. Our Saviour Himself taught this plainly. "Strive," said He, "to enter in at the straight gate;" agonize to enter in; and when He used that language He was not, of course, exaggerating the difficulties in our way; He was not putting His people on superfluous effort to obtain eternal life; He was not exciting alarm for which there was no occasion. But He thus exhorted

them because He knew the world put so many difficulties in their way ; and that the great adversary of souls put so many difficulties in their way, and that their own evil natures put so many difficulties in the way, that they could not get in unless they thus strove. Other passages are of similar import. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure;" give diligence in reading, in meditation, in prayer, in the discharge of all Christian duties, and in self-examination, because the great attainment can be made in no easier way. "Lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset you, and run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith," because the race cannot be successfully run with any less earnestness and effort. "Forget the things that are behind and reach forth to those that are before, and press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," because the prize can never be won by any less endeavour. Thus do the Scriptures teach that the righteous are saved with difficulty when regarded from the human side as well as from the divine side.

I have called attention to this subject that we may be brought more fully to understand and appreciate the goodness of God in the salvation of His people, and that we may more clearly see the extent of our obligations to Him. If He

could have saved us by some easy process and had saved us in that way, He would have displayed great goodness towards us and we should have been under great obligations to love and serve Him. But since we could be saved only in that difficult way which has now been indicated, how much greater does His goodness appear and by how much are our obligations to Him enhanced! His goodness now appears to be as great as can be conceived, and our obligations to Him become as great as can rest on finite beings; and thus this truth furnishes the ground for the strongest appeals to us for gratitude and love and service that could possibly be addressed to us, and in view of such a truth every true child of God must find it an easy and delightful duty to present to God his body and his soul; all that he is and all that he has, "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to Him, which is his reasonable service."

Before passing from the subject it may be well to remark, however, that while the righteous are saved with so much difficulty, there is no uncertainty about it. Great as are the difficulties in the way of their salvation, God overcomes them all. It was difficult to provide a plan of salvation; but He has nevertheless provided one more glorious than any other that could be conceived. It is difficult to apply it after it has been provided; but there are no obstacles here that He

cannot surmount. No mind is so dark that He cannot enlighten it; no heart is so hard that He cannot dissolve it in true penitence; no will is so perverse and stubborn that He cannot subdue it and bring it into subjection to His own will; no soul so utterly ruined and lost that He cannot save it. It is a difficult thing after they have been brought into a state of salvation to keep them in it; but He is able "to keep them by His power through faith unto salvation." "Not one of them is lost." They are all "brought off conquerors and more than conquerors through Him who hath loved them." They all enter at last triumphantly through the gates into the city.

And now just a word in regard to the latter part of the text, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Where shall they appear in that day? If even the righteous are saved with so much difficulty, how shall the ungodly and the sinner be saved at all? If those are saved with so much difficulty who accept the means of salvation which God has provided, how are those to be saved who reject them? If the righteous are saved with so much difficulty after all their efforts, how are the ungodly and the sinner to be saved who put forth no efforts whatever?

XI

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

“There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it.”—I JOHN v. 16.

IN the immediately preceding context the apostle is discussing the subject of prayer. “And this is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us ; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.” He then adds the text : “There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it.” How those to whom he was writing might know when any one had committed the sin unto death, and so not pray for him, we are not informed. Perhaps they had means of information of which we have no account. What it concerns us to observe, however, as taught by the text, is that there is a sin that is unpardonable ; a sin in regard to which no prayer is to be offered ; a sin that crosses the mysterious

boundary that separates between God's patience and wrath and irretrievably dooms the soul to eternal death.

The same truth is taught in a number of other passages. It is taught in the Old Testament. When Isaiah was commissioned to preach to the Israelites, he was informed beforehand that they would hear, indeed, but that they would not understand ; that they would see, but that they would not perceive ; that they had gone so far in sin that the only effect of his preaching would be to make their hearts fat and their ears dull and their eyes heavy ; that, indeed, in righteous judgment upon them for their past abuse of the truth, it was not intended that his preaching should have upon them any other effect than this, and that consequently only a remnant of them would be saved. On another occasion, God said to the prophet Hosea : " Let Ephraim alone. He is joined to his idols." At the time, the tribe of Ephraim was the largest and most influential of all the tribes of Israel and was taken, perhaps, as representative of the whole kingdom of Israel. But it was given up to idolatry, notwithstanding all that had been done to restrain and correct its tendencies in that direction ; it was " joined to idols," and, therefore, the Lord in righteous judgment forbade the prophet to make any further efforts in its behalf. In such passages as these is it taught in the Old

Testament that there is a "sin unto death." It is taught also in a number of passages in the New Testament. In the Gospels our Saviour is represented as saying, "All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith they shall blaspheme, but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation ;" or as the revised version has it, is "guilty of an eternal sin." Concerning His betrayal by Judas Iscariot, He said, "It had been good for that man if he had never been born," a declaration that could be true, of course, only on the supposition that Judas was never to be saved. In reference to the inhabitants of Jerusalem He said, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this day, the things that belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." In the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews it is said, that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to open shame." And in the tenth chapter it is said, "If we sin willfully after that we have received a knowledge of truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful look-

ing for of judgment and fiery indignation that shall devour the adversaries." Thus in a number of passages in both the Old and the New Testaments it is plainly taught that there is a sin for which there is no pardon ; a sin in reference to which no prayer need be offered.

Indeed, at first view there would seem to be a number of such sins. A casual consideration of such passages as have just been quoted would, I suppose, make the impression on almost any one, not only that each one of them makes mention of a sin that is unto death, but that each one of them makes mention of a different sin that is unto death. When it is said that the Israelites would hear the prophet Isaiah, but that they would not understand ; that they would see, but that they would not perceive ; that their ears had waxed dull and their eyes they had closed, it would seem to be taught that profound indifference and insensibility to the truth is a sin unto death. When it is said, "Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone," it would seem to be taught that persistent and flagrant idolatry is a sin unto death. When it is said that he that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost shall never have forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the world to come, it would seem to be taught that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is a sin unto death. When it is said that it had been good if Judas Iscariot had never been born, it would

seem to be taught that a gross betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ is a sin unto death. When it is said in regard to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes," it would seem to be taught that an utter neglect to improve seasons of gracious visitation is a sin unto death. When it is said, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, if they shall fall away, to renew them unto repentance," it would seem to be taught that a refusal to yield to certain powerful influences of the truth and of the Spirit, is a sin unto death. When it is said that "If we sin willfully after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment that shall devour the adversaries," it would seem to be taught that willful sinning against clear light is a sin unto death. Thus a casual consideration of these different passages would probably make the impression on almost any one not only that each one of them makes mention of a sin that is unto death, but that each one of them makes mention of a different sin that is unto death; and it may be that that would be the conclusion after the most careful consideration, if the text and our Saviour did not

so plainly teach that there is but one sin that is unto death.

But while there is but one sin that is unto death, it is plain that that one sin presents itself in the Scriptures under a number of different forms. In the case of the Israelites to whom Isaiah preached, it presented itself under the form of profound indifference and insensibility to the truth. In the case of the Ephraimites, it presented itself under the form of flagrant and persistent idolatry. In the case of certain Jews, it presented itself under the form of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. In the case of Judas Iscariot, it presented itself under the form of a gross betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the case of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it presented itself under the form of an utter neglect to improve seasons of gracious visitation. In the case of those mentioned in the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, it presents itself under the form of a refusal to yield to certain powerful influences of the truth and the Spirit, and in the case of those mentioned in the tenth chapter it presents itself under the form of willful sinning against clear light. It must be admitted that the sin thus presents itself in the Scriptures under all these different forms because each one of these sins is represented as a sin unto death, and yet it is plainly taught by our Saviour and the text that there is but one sin that is a sin unto

death. In what respect, however, these sins, apparently so different, are all alike; in what profound and controlling trait they may all be gathered up into the dreadful unity of the single sin of the text, it is impossible, I suppose, to point out. Certainly there is little agreement amongst those who have made the attempt. The fact seems to be that God has intentionally left the nature of this sin so obscure that it cannot be accurately defined; and that He has done this for at least two reasons:

One is that we have no right to know just what this sin is. We have no right to know just where it is on the line of sinful progress. Clearly we have no right to know just how far we can go in wronging God without incurring fatal consequences. Suppose there were somewhere on our seacoast a dreadful maelstrom that could not without great danger be approached from any direction. Suppose, however, that none of the citizens of our country had any right on that part of our high seas; that no interest called them thither; that no duty demanded their presence there; that, for some reason, no matter what, they could not go thither without violating important laws, would the government in such circumstances be under any obligation to construct a chart of that portion of the ocean, giving the exact latitude and longitude of that maelstrom, indicating just how nearly it might

be approached from different directions with safety? Certainly not, and to any demand for such information from any of its citizens it might justly respond, "You have no business on that part of our seacoast; you have no right to go thither; no legitimate interest calls you thither; you cannot go thither without violating the laws of your country, as you well know, and the very fact that you are seeking the information you now demand seems to indicate that you desire to do something you have no right to do, and are trying to find out how you may do it with safety." Well, so men have no right to know where in the wide domain of sin lies this particular sin of the text. They have no right to enter that domain at any point. They have no right to take a single step into it, and, therefore, they have no right to know how far they can go into it without incurring the doom which the text threatens. One reason, then, why the Scriptures do not tell us exactly what this sin is, is that we have no right to know.

The other reason why they do not tell us is that such knowledge, if given, would be grossly abused. Who does not know that if the nature of the sin were distinctly given; if its location in the line of sinful progress were clearly indicated, so that men might know just when it would be reached, they would boldly go forward in transgression until they should come right up to that

point, knowing that they could do it without incurring fatal consequences? The precise nature and location of the sin, then, are intentionally concealed, that men, not knowing where it is, nor how soon it may be reached, may be deterred from going any farther in the direction in which it is known to lie. If one wished to protect an orchard of valuable fruit from depredators, he might employ for that purpose a pitfall, and he might give notice that he was doing it by means of placards posted around the enclosure, but he would not tell just where the pitfall was, for then the depredators could easily avoid it and enter the orchard at some other point, but he would keep its location a strict secret with himself that they might be afraid to enter it at any point, lest the very point of entrance should be the point of danger. Well, it may be said that God seeks to protect the domain of His rights from invasion, and that He employs the sin of the text as a kind of pitfall for that purpose, and in His mercy to men He warns them in many ways that He is doing it, but He does not tell them where the pitfall is. If He did, they would boldly and defiantly trample all over that domain except on that fatal spot, knowing that they could do it without fatal results; but He keeps its location as one of those secrets that belong unto the Lord, that men may be afraid to invade that domain at any point,

lest the very point of invasion should be the point of doom.

For such reasons as these God has not told us in what precisely the sin consists, nor has He informed us just when it may be reached in a course of transgression and its guilt incurred; and certainly these reasons for thus reserving information on the subject are abundantly sufficient.

But while He has not told us exactly what the sin is, nor where it is, He has very plainly indicated to us, in a number of ways, how we may know when we are approaching it and when our danger is beginning to be serious. In other words, He points out a number of sins in the Scriptures which pressed far enough—and we do not know how far is enough—become the sin of the text, and so a “sin that is unto death”; and it is to some of these sins your attention is now invited.

I. It seems to be taught that the sin of indifference and insensibility to the truth pressed far enough becomes the sin of the text. As we have seen, this was the sin of the Israelites to whom Isaiah preached. They were so profoundly indifferent and insensible that even his preaching made no impression on them. “Their ears grew dull, and their eyes they closed;” and it was fatal to them. Here, then, seems to be one sin that may become so aggravated as to merge into the sin of the text. It concerns every hearer of

the Gospel, therefore, to inquire whether he is in danger of being guilty of this sin. How long have you been listening to the Gospel? Ten years? Twenty years? Fifty years? What impression has it made on you? What impression is it making now? Does it arouse in your minds no serious thoughts? Does it excite in your hearts no serious emotions? Are you disregarding its warnings; rejecting its invitations; disobeying its commands? Are you doing it constantly and easily? Then fidelity to your spiritual interests requires that you should be told that you are on the direct road to this sin; on the very road by which the Israelites reached it, and how soon you may reach it no one knows.

II. It is evident that idolatry is a sin of such a sort that pressed far enough becomes the sin of the text. This, as we have seen, was the sin of Ephraim. "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone;" make no further efforts in his behalf; leave him to his fate. But idolatry has not disappeared from the earth. It is a sin of which all the unconverted are guilty; for what is idolatry? It consists in bestowing on some other object that worship which is due to God alone. But what is worship? How do we worship God? We worship Him when we fix our thoughts on Him; when we fix our affections on Him; when we seek Him; when we delight in Him; when we serve Him. When, then, we

bestow these exercises of mind and heart supremely on any other object, that is idolatry. But all the unconverted do bestow these exercises of mind and heart supremely on some other object. They bestow them on secular good in some one of its different forms. Do they not fix their thoughts on it more than they do on God? Do they not fix their affections on it more than they do on God? Do they not seek it more than they do God? Do they not delight in it more than they do in God? Do they not serve it more than they do God, in the sense that they put forth much more effort to secure it than they do to obtain God's favour? Thus they are in God's sight as truly idolaters as if they bowed down to stocks or stones; as truly idolaters as if they kissed their hands to Ashtaroth or offered incense to the moon. But how long, unconverted friends, have you been guilty of this sin, and in spite of what restraining and corrective influences have you persisted in it? Have you thus been guilty of it for years? Is there no danger, then, that the time may be near when God will say, "He is joined to his idols. Let him alone."

III. Another sin which pressed far enough becomes the sin of the text is the sin of rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ. This, as we have seen, was the sin of the Jews. Although they heard His teaching; although they had heard Him speak

as never man spake ; although they had witnessed the many miracles He performed, as He gave sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb, and health to the sick, and life to the dead ; although they had the most abundant and conclusive evidence that He was what He claimed to be, they persisted in rejecting Him until at last it was fatal to them ; until He exclaimed in view of their ruin, " O that thou hadst known, even now, at least in this day, the things that belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." But all the unconverted are still rejecting Him ; and they are rejecting Him with greater knowledge of Him than the Jews had. The unconverted now know more about His character than the mass of the Jews knew. Many of the Jews knew comparatively little about Him, and were under the impression that He was a religious fanatic or impostor of some sort. They knew very little about His teaching. They had heard only a single discourse, or parts of discourses, or reports of discourses that reached them in the mutilated form of public rumour. They knew very little about His purpose in coming into the world and of the nature and objects of the kingdom He proposed to establish, and so in regard to all other subjects connected with His character and work. It is plain from the New Testament records that many of the Jews thus knew very little about Him. But

the unconverted of the present day know a great deal about Him. As to His character, they know that He was "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." As to His teaching, they have been familiar with its essential truths all their lives, and there is nothing they know better than His purpose in coming into the world, and they are familiar with the nature of the kingdom He is establishing and with the great objects it is intended to accomplish. They are confronted, therefore, with a question of solemn import: if the rejection of Christ by the Jews with so much less knowledge was fatal to them, is there not most serious reason to fear that their persistent rejection of Him with so much greater knowledge may be equally fatal to them? Is not this a question that demands their serious consideration? If they have been rejecting Him for months and years is there no danger that they may be drawing near to a point, when they may be abandoned just as the Jews were? They may say, however, and thus seek to quiet their consciences and their fears, "While we are rejecting Christ, we are not rejecting Him as the Jews did. They shed His blood, and put Him to death. We surely have done nothing of that kind." But, perhaps, there is not here so great a difference as they imagine. They have not shed His blood, indeed, but how have they treated it since it was shed, and shed for them? They have treated it in a

way that the Scriptures describe as trampling it under their feet. But if so, then, perhaps, the Saviour would just as soon have had them shed His blood as to have them thus trample it under their feet. They have not, indeed, put Him to death as the Jews did, but how have they treated Him since He was put to death and put to death that they might not die? They have so treated Him that it is described in the Scriptures as a "crucifying of Him afresh." But if so, perhaps, He would about as soon have had them crucify Him in the first instance as have them crucify Him afresh in this second instance, especially when the first crucifixion was all over in a few hours, while this second crucifixion is repeated, continued, protracted, mercilessly stretched out through months and years. Perhaps there is no such difference here, then, as is imagined. Perhaps the Saviour would just as soon have the crown of thorns from the Jews as to have from the unconverted of the present day the ingratitude with which they are treating Him. Perhaps the spear thrust into His side did not hurt Him any more than the treatment He is now receiving from the multitudes who are rejecting Him; and if so, is there no danger that their rejection of Him may at any time develop into the sin of the text?

IV. Still another sin which pressed far enough becomes the sin of the text is the sin of failing to improve seasons of gracious visitation. This was

the sin of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. For years they had had the temple of God in their city, and the oracles of God, and the priests and the sacrifices, all the means of salvation God had instituted ; and latterly they had had the ministry of Christ ; He had stood in their streets and cried, " If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." They had thus enjoyed seasons of the most gracious visitation ; but they had not improved them, and the result was disastrous. The Saviour Himself laments over their doom. But men still have their seasons of gracious visitation. Indeed, it may be correctly said in regard to all who live in Christian communities that their whole lives are just one protracted season of gracious visitation. But almost all, if not all, have had seasons of special visitation ; seasons when the truth deeply impressed their minds and hearts ; aroused serious thoughts and emotions ; prompted them to reading, meditation, prayer and reformation of life. Some have had a number of such seasons. But they have not been properly improved. They have not yielded to the unusual spiritual influences thus brought to bear upon them. They have continued to live in sin. God has called ; they have refused. He has stretched out His hands ; they have not regarded. Is not their sin very much like the sin of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and is there no danger that if it be persevered in, it may soon

assume the same character and incur the same doom ?

There are still other sins, as the Scriptures teach, that by aggravation may become the sin of the text. I shall briefly mention, however, only two more. That remarkable passage in the sixth chapter of Hebrews seems to teach that if a man is brought under divine influences to the extent there indicated ; if “ he has been once enlightened and has tasted of the heavenly gift and has been made partaker of the Holy Ghost,” and has thus been brought, as it were, to the very door of the kingdom, and yet even there has refused to enter in, he is in the utmost danger. So much as that it seems clearly to teach. It may be said, therefore, to all those who in times past were so deeply impressed by the truth as to be constrained to make a profession of faith, and yet have later abandoned that profession and returned to a life of worldliness and sin, that they are in the most imminent peril. It profoundly concerns them to consider whether there is not danger that their sin may soon become the sin of the text.

The passage in the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews teaches that sinning against clear light may be carried to such a length as to become the sin of the text. “ If we sin willfully after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of

fiery indignation that shall devour the adversaries." But do not all the unconverted sin against clear light ; against the clear light of reason, and of conscience, and of providence and of revelation ? Is there no danger, therefore, that they may thus so willfully sin, after receiving a knowledge of the truth, that the dreadful announcement of the text shall have application to them ? Is there not a danger here that demands their serious consideration ?

Thus a number of sins have been pointed out, which, if indulged too far, become the sin of the text. If any one is guilty of any one of these sins, then, he is in peril. But it should now be added that every unconverted person is guilty of almost all of these sins. He is profoundly indifferent and insensible to the truth ; he is an idolater in the sense explained ; he rejects the Saviour ; he has failed rightly to improve seasons of gracious visitation and he has willfully sinned against clear light. Thus he is in danger, not simply from one sin, but from a number of sins. He is in danger of falling into the sin of the text, not only in one way, but in a number of ways. Certainly this is a fact of which he should take immediate and earnest account.

There is time for only two remarks in conclusion :

One is that if any one wishes to know whether he has already committed this sin, he has but to inquire whether he is now concerned about his

spiritual interests and whether he is now seeking the divine favour. If he now sees the evil of sin, and desires to be delivered from it, and to be brought into harmony with the divine will and into subjection to the divine authority, he thus has evidence of the presence of the Spirit in his mind and heart, and so has evidence that he has not yet been totally abandoned.

The other remark is, that while there is in a special sense a sin unto death, it is to be remembered that any sin may at any time become a sin unto death. There are diseases of the body for which there is no remedy. They are always fatal. There are other diseases that are curable, but may result in death as certainly as the diseases for which there is no remedy, unless the remedies are used. So, while there is a sin for which nothing can be done, but it always results in the death of the soul, and while for all other sins there is abundant provision for pardon, those for which there is pardon will just as certainly as the sin for which there is no pardon destroy the soul unless that pardon is sought and obtained. Let not the unconverted, then, imagine they are in no special danger because they have not committed the sin of the text. Any other sin, as certainly as the sin of the text, may at any time become fatal, and just as fatal, through the intervention of death. There is no safety except in that refuge which the Gospel provides.

XII

DOCTRINES OF CALVINISM

"Give attendance to doctrine."—1 TIM. iv. 13.

IN many minds there is much prejudice against doctrines and especially against doctrinal preaching. It is said that many of the doctrines are very obscure; that they are difficult to understand; that there is too much difference of opinion concerning them for them to be profitable subjects of discussion; that the only result of such discussion is to confuse and bewilder the understanding and to draw the attention away from the practical duties of life into a region of barren speculation. Besides, it is sometimes added, it does not make much difference what any one believes in regard to the doctrines of religion, provided he keeps close to the duties laid down in the Scriptures, and that, therefore, the kind of preaching to be preferred is that which points out those duties and insists on their discharge. There can be no doubt that this view is now somewhat prevalent in the Christian world. All who hold this view, however, overlook the nature of the doctrines of

religion. What are those doctrines? To what do they relate? They relate to such subjects as the nature and attributes of God; to the relations in which He stands to men, and to the relations in which they stand to Him; to man's past history and present condition and future destiny. These are some of the subjects to which the doctrines relate; and now observe: every true doctrine is simply the assertion of a fact in regard to one or more of these subjects. It is a doctrine of religion that "God is a Spirit infinite, eternal and unchangeable in being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth"; but that is also a fact. It is a doctrine of religion that man has fallen from the high estate in which he was created by sinning against God, and so has become spiritually depraved, but that is also a fact. It is a doctrine of religion that "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," except the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but that, like the other two doctrines just mentioned, is a fact. And the same is true of all the doctrines of religion. They are all facts, and thus they lie at the very foundation of religion. They make religion possible, since they furnish the basis on which it rests. What sort of religion would that be that was not grounded in and built up on well ascertained facts? Since the doctrines of religion, then, are the facts of religion, religion cannot be

intelligently and intelligibly preached except as its doctrines are preached. How could any science be taught except as its facts were made known, and so how can religion be inculcated except as its facts, which are its doctrines, are proclaimed? No prejudice, therefore, can be more unreasonable than the widely prevalent prejudice against the preaching of doctrines.

But those who are affected by this prejudice not only overlook the true nature of doctrines. They overlook, also, the relation that subsists between doctrines and duties. They insist that religion should be made practical, and they imagine that the best way to make it practical is to preach its duties. They fail to take account of the fact, however, that the doctrines of religion make its duties, and that, therefore, it is impossible to make it intelligently practical except as its doctrines are made known. Why is it my duty, for instance, to love God? In order to find an answer to that question must I not turn to certain doctrines of religion, and do I not say that it is my duty to love Him because He is infinitely excellent and glorious in Himself; because He is my Creator, Preserver and Redeemer; because He has bestowed great blessings upon me in the past and offers to bestow upon me still greater blessings in the future; and do I not thus make the duty of loving Him depend on a number of doctrines and do not

those doctrines make the duty of loving Him, and if it were not for those doctrines and if those doctrines were not facts, would I be under any obligation whatever to fix upon Him the supreme affections of my heart? Why is it my duty to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? In order to find an answer for that question, must I not again turn to certain doctrines of religion, and do I not say that it is my duty to believe on Him because I am a sinner; a lost, ruined and helpless sinner; because He is the only Saviour of sinners; because He is my rightful sovereign and commands me to believe on Him; because He is able to save me and willing to save me; because only by believing on Him can I be brought into that spiritual condition in which it will be possible for me to render to Him the love and service which are due to Him; and do I not thus make this duty, also, depend on a number of doctrines and do not these doctrines make the duty of believing on Him, and if it were not for these doctrines, and if these doctrines were not also facts, would there be any reason whatever why I should repose in Him the supreme confidence of my soul? Well, what is thus true of these two great duties is equally true of all the duties of religion. They are all made by the doctrines of religion. It is impossible to point out a single duty that is not made by one or more of the doctrines taught in the word of God.

Since, then, the doctrines of religion make the duties of religion, the doctrines must be preached in order that the duties may be known. Since the doctrines give rise to the duties, it is impossible, in the nature of the case, that any one should know any more about his duties ; about their origin, their nature, their number, their importance and their obligatory force, than he knows about the doctrines out of which they spring. Doctrines and duties are always, therefore, to be presented in closest connection, the doctrines as giving rise to the duties ; the duties as springing out of the doctrines. It is thus they are presented in our standards and in the Scriptures.

So much in regard to the importance of doctrines in general. I wish at this time, however, to invite attention particularly to certain doctrines of our Calvinistic creed to which we attach much importance. Of course we attach supreme importance to what are known as the essential doctrines of religion, as the existence of God ; the divinity of Christ ; regeneration by the Holy Spirit and the like. But while we attach supreme importance to these doctrines, we at the same time attach great importance to certain other doctrines generally known as the doctrines of Calvinism, and it is to some of these doctrines that your attention is now invited. Let me say at once, however, that they are called the doc-

trines of Calvinism, not because Calvin was the first to hold and teach them. They were held and taught long before he was born. They were held and taught by Augustine and by a number who succeeded him. Nor were they first held and taught by them. They were held and taught long before they were born by the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New, and by our Saviour Himself, every one of them. The only sense in which they may properly be called Calvinistic is that Calvin succeeded in stating them in a remarkably clear way and in establishing them in a remarkably conclusive manner. The particular points of Calvinism are designated as total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, invincible grace and the perseverance of the saints. Of course it will not be possible, within the narrow limits of a single discourse, to consider all these important doctrines. I shall give special attention, therefore, to those against which most objections are made and that most need, perhaps, to be explained and defended.

I. I begin with the doctrine of total depravity, a doctrine rejected by many, no doubt, in large measure at least, because they do not know what is meant by it. What, then, do we mean by it? We do not mean that all men are equally bad. We know that that is not true. We do not mean that all men are as bad

as they can be. We know that that is not true. We do not mean that any man is as bad as he can be. We know that that is not true. Nor do we mean that men are destitute of reason and conscience. We do not mean that reason no longer distinguishes within them between truth and error and that conscience no longer discriminates between right and wrong. We know that that is not true. On the contrary, one of the strongest arguments for total depravity is drawn from reason and conscience, and in this way. The fact that men can in regard to their highest interests; those interests that they themselves admit to be their highest interests; their eternal interests, go contrary to their own reason and contrary to their own consciences; the fact that they can do in regard to them what their own reason wholly disapproves and what their own consciences utterly condemn, and the fact they can do it deliberately and persistently for months and years together, and the further fact that they can do it easily; as easily as they ever do anything; such facts as these prove as clearly as facts can prove anything, that they are totally under the dominion of some dreadful moral and spiritual perversion. Indeed, how can men be in a worse condition than when, in regard to interests they admit to be infinitely important, they can wholly disregard every dictate of reason, every suggestion

of prudence, every demand of safety and every requirement of conscience? If such men are not totally under the dominion of moral evil, when would they be? We do not mean, then, by total depravity that unconverted men are without reason and without conscience, but we do mean that although they have reason and have consciences, they act, in reference to interests that they admit transcend all others in importance to an infinite degree, precisely as if they had no reason and precisely as if they had no consciences, and thus a strong argument for total depravity is drawn from the presence of these faculties in their souls.

Further: We do not mean by the doctrine of the total depravity of the unconverted to deny that they possess, many of them, moral excellences. We do not deny that many of them, in important respects, are good neighbours, good friends, good parents, good children, good rulers, good citizens. We do not deny that they possess moral traits that are admirable and commendable. But if we thus admit, as we are glad to do, that they have in them much that is morally good, how can we at the same time assert that they are totally depraved? Is not that a contradiction in terms? In order to answer such questions a distinction must be made between religion and morality. Just how the boundary lines here are to be drawn; just how much is to be included

in the one sphere, the sphere of religion, and just how much in the other sphere, the sphere of morality, moralists and theologians might not agree. It is not necessary, however, for the purpose in hand, that the lines be drawn with perfect accuracy. It is enough to say that religion always includes morality, but that morality does not, by any means, always include religion, and that, therefore, a man may have morality without having religion ; he may have a good deal of morality without having a particle of religion ; he may have a good deal of morality, and yet be a skeptic, rejecting the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures ; he may be even an atheist, rejecting not only the fundamental teachings of the book, but the author of the book. When, then, we assert that the unconverted are totally depraved, we do not mean that they are totally depraved morally, but that they are totally depraved spiritually. We do not mean that they are totally destitute of moral qualities, but that they are totally destitute of spiritual qualities. And when the doctrine is thus correctly stated, it is difficult to see how any intelligent Christian can call it in question. Are not the unconverted totally destitute of spiritual qualities? Are they not totally destitute of faith, repentance, love, and all the other graces of the Spirit, and if they are totally destitute thus of all spiritual good, must they not in that respect be totally evil, totally de-

praved? A correct statement of the doctrine is thus enough to establish it. It may be well, however, to mention briefly a few arguments by which it may be sustained.

One argument is found in a few facts attested by the consciousness of the unconverted :

1. They are all totally destitute of true love to God, to the Saviour, to the word of God, and to the law and service of God. If they were not totally destitute of true love to these great objects, they would not be unconverted. If they had any true love for them, that would prove that they had been "renewed in the spirit of their minds" and that the work of salvation in them had begun.

2. Another fact is that they are not only destitute of true love to those great objects, but they are totally averse to them. They are totally averse to God, as is evident from the fact that, although He is so excellent and glorious in Himself and the author of all their mercies, they are "enmity against Him," and refuse to give Him any proper place in their minds and hearts. They are totally averse to Christ, as is evident from the fact that although "He is the chiefest among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely," He appears to them "like a root out of dry ground, having no form or comeliness and there is no beauty in Him that they should desire Him." They are totally averse to the word of God as is

evident from the fact that, although it is the best of all books, they would rather read almost any other book than to read it, and from the further fact that although they have had it in their possession all their lives, ten years, twenty years, fifty years it may be, they have never yet, many of them, once read it through. They are totally averse to the law of God, as is evident from the fact that although that law is perfectly holy and just and good, demanding only that to which God has a perfect right and only that which is for their own highest interests for time and eternity, they are "not subject to it, neither indeed can be." They are totally averse to the service of God, as is evident from the fact that although it is the highest and noblest service in which finite beings can engage, and although it proposes to bestow on men every blessing they need, they not only refuse to engage in it, but antagonize it as it seeks to accomplish its beneficent ends, even as it seeks to accomplish them in their own persons, by refusing the blessings it seeks to bestow. Thus they are not only destitute of true love to these great objects, but they are totally averse to them, as their own consciousness will assure them if only they will attend to the testimony which it gives.

3. Still another fact: they are not only totally destitute of true love to these great objects and totally averse to them, as their own consciousness

will assure them if they will candidly consult it, but, as their own consciousness will as certainly and as distinctly assure them, if they will only listen to its testimony, they are supremely in love with that which is infinitely opposed to those great objects; they are supremely in love with sin; with sin in those particular forms of it that commend themselves to their particular perverse appetites, desires and passions, as is evident from the fact that they so much prefer sin in these forms to those great objects that they cling to it in preference to those great objects, although they know that such preference may at any moment forever involve them in the most disastrous consequences that a finite being can incur. If such facts as these, no one of which can be denied, do not prove that they are spiritually totally depraved, what is lacking to make the demonstration complete? One argument, then, to prove the doctrine of total spiritual depravity is drawn from these three facts, attested to be facts by the consciousness of every unconverted person, and, therefore, facts that cannot be called in question.

II. But what consciousness thus teaches, is taught also by the sure word of God. Humanitarian authors and preachers, indeed, are accustomed to say much about the nobility of man; the dignity of human nature; the wonderful achievements of man in art, in science, and in philosophy, and in all the other secular pursuits

in which he engages, and about his ability, in the exercise of his own unaided powers, to make high attainments in civilization and in moral excellence, and the Scriptures do not deny the possibility of much that is thus claimed. Still, when they come to speak of man's spiritual condition; of his relation to the kingdom of God; of his attitude towards spiritual truth and holiness of life and the law of God, they make use of language descriptive of his state very different from that which these humanitarian authors and preachers employ. They say, for instance, in the fourteenth Psalm, and repeat it in the fifty-third, and repeat it again in the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans, as if by the very repetition to impress upon men, in an indelible way, their condition as God sees it, they say, "God looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God," and what was the result of this omniscient survey of the whole human race? "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God; they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good; no, not one." Such is God's judgment as to the condition of the whole human race in its unsaved state. It is a ruined race; ruined, because totally under the dominion of spiritual evil. The Scriptures abound in similar teachings. They say that we were "shapen in

iniquity"; that we were "conceived in sin"; that we are "estranged from the womb"; that "the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually"; that our "hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"; that, in short, we are "dead in trespasses and in sins." They teach that our guilt is so great that the infinite merit of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is necessary to blot it out. They teach that the corruption of our souls is so great that the infinite resources of the power and grace of the third Person of the adorable Trinity are necessary to purify them and make them fit temples for His indwelling. They teach that we are so undeserving and so ill-deserving, that not only is grace necessary for our salvation, but an infinite measure of it, for what more could infinite love do than it has done in prompting such a scheme of salvation for us as we now have; what more could infinite wisdom do than it has done in devising such a scheme, and what more could infinite power do than it is doing in bestowing its blessings on the human race? In these and in many other ways do the Scriptures teach that man is so totally under the dominion of spiritual evil that God alone can rescue him and that even He can do it only in the exercise of His infinite power and grace.

I shall take time to notice only one objection that may be made to this doctrine: "If all are

totally depraved, how is it, as we are obliged to admit, that some are much worse than others? Can there be degrees in a depravity that is total?" An illustration may furnish an answer to these questions. During the Civil War it was no uncommon thing to see lying on a battlefield the body of a dead soldier, that had been overlooked by the burial corps and that had lain for a number of days exposed to the heat of a summer's sun and to other elements of nature, and so had become so distorted in every feature and part that we could not bear to look upon it; but we turned away from it in pain and distress that the body of a fellow being could ever come into a condition so dreadful as that. But here, on the other hand, is a beautiful young bride, arrayed in her nuptial robes, who has just fallen dead at the marriage altar. Her heart has ceased to throb; her pulse has ceased to beat. Yet the brightness of youth has not yet faded out of her eyes; the bloom of youth has not yet faded off her cheeks; the dew of youth is still in her tresses. She is almost as beautiful as she was before she became the victim of the fatal stroke. What accounts for the difference in the condition of these two dead bodies? It is not to be accounted for by the fact that both are not dead; that both are not equally dead; that both are not totally dead; for both are precisely alike in that respect; but it is to be accounted for only

by the fact that death in the one case has wrought out its dreadful consequences more fully than in the other case. Well, so here. Some men are worse than others ; much worse. But the reason is, not that they are not all alike spiritually dead ; totally dead ; but that, in some cases, the disastrous consequences of this spiritual death are much more fully developed than they are in other cases. This objection is thus easily answered in consistency with the truth of the doctrine.

Now, to this doctrine Calvinists attach much importance, because it, and it alone, reveals to the sinner his true condition in God's sight, and because, therefore, it, and it alone, enables him fully to see how much he needs the great salvation which has been provided for him, and because, hence, it brings to bear upon him a mightier influence than any other doctrine to induce him to accept that salvation. Could any doctrine be of more practical importance than that ? Don't sinners need to know what is their true condition in God's sight ? Don't they need to know how much they need the great salvation that has been provided for them ? Don't they need to have brought to bear upon them the mightiest influences possible to induce them to accept that salvation ? Well, this doctrine serves all these purposes, as no modification of it does, and, therefore, we attach to it, as one of the doc-

trines of God's word, great practical importance, and insist that it shall be constantly and earnestly taught and preached.

III. I call your attention to the doctrine of election; a doctrine against which more objection is made, perhaps, than against any other in our system; but again, as I believe, because it is not rightly understood. I shall introduce what I wish to say about it by some remarks about the decrees of God in general. We are supposed by some to mean by the eternal decrees of God something very mysterious; something very arbitrary; something of fearful import to a large portion of the human race; something that unalterably determines the eternal destiny of a large portion of the human race, not only without regard to mercy, but even without regard to justice. In short, it is charged by some that we mean that God has created a large portion of the human race for no other purpose except ultimately to destroy it. But can it be possible that that is what is meant by our doctrine here? The Presbyterian denomination is admitted, I believe, to be an intelligent denomination; as intelligent, on the whole, as any other. But can it be that an intelligent denomination would hold a doctrine so contrary to reason and so dishonouring to God? Let me say, in passing, that whenever any evangelical denomination, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, or any

other, is represented as teaching a doctrine so unreasonable and so dishonouring to God as that, you may know that in being so represented it is misrepresented. God's true people, taught by His word and by His Spirit, cannot hold such doctrines as those. What, then, do we mean by the decrees of God? We mean, to employ simple language, those plans which God formed beforehand in regard to the universe He intended to bring into existence, for its government and for the administration of its affairs. Must He not have formed such plans? Would He bring into existence such a universe as this, and fill it with millions of immortal beings, without forming beforehand any plans in regard to it, as to what He would do with it; as to the ends He would accomplish by it? Does the intelligent architect ever undertake to build a great house without forming beforehand plans in regard to it, as to cost; as to material; as to size; as to shape; as to uses? Does the business man ever enter upon any great business enterprise without forming beforehand plans in regard to it, as to capital; as to agents; as to methods; as to ends? Does any man of any intelligence ever undertake to do anything important without forming beforehand in regard to it the best plans of which he is capable? Can we believe, then, that the great God would bring into existence this world and all the other worlds we see in the fields of space

above us, and people them with innumerable millions of immortal sentient beings, capable of infinite exaltation in holiness, or of infinite degradation in sin ; susceptible of infinite happiness or infinite misery, without forming beforehand any plans in regard to them, as to the government He would institute over them ; as to the laws to which He would subject them ; as to the duties He would require of them ; as to the rewards He would bestow for obedience ; as to the penalties He would inflict for disobedience? Well, those plans, that we must believe that He thus formed beforehand, are what our standards mean, and what Calvinism means, and what the Scriptures mean, by the decrees of God. Is there anything mysterious, or arbitrary, or alarming about such a doctrine as that? Is not every intelligent person obliged to hold it?

What these plans were that He must thus have formed beforehand, we ourselves can now to some small extent see. What were His plans in regard to the material universe, we can, to some extent, see in the operation of the physical laws by which it is governed and in the results they bring about. What were His plans in regard to man's merely secular interests, we can see, to some extent, in the providence He exercises over him and in the secular blessings He bestows upon him. What were His plans in regard to his moral interests, apart from his religious

interests, we can see in the moral government He has instituted over him and in the rewards He bestows upon the virtuous and in the judgments He inflicts upon the vicious. But now can it be possible that He formed plans beforehand in regard to the material universe, and in regard to man's merely secular and moral interests, and yet formed no plans in regard to those interests that infinitely transcend all these in importance, his spiritual interests for time and for eternity? Why, if He formed beforehand any plans at all, must He not have formed plans in regard to those interests that are so much more important than all other interests whatever? If He formed any plans at all that were worthy of Him; worthy of His infinite knowledge and wisdom and righteousness and goodness, must not those plans have been of that character? And if He formed such plans thus worthy of Him, must He not now be carrying them out; must He not now be carrying them out as originally formed? Must we not say that He ought now to be carrying them out as originally formed? If they were worthy of Him; worthy of the infinite attributes of His nature, must they not be infinitely perfect, and as such the very plans that every intelligent being should now wish to be executed? If one fears that because of his sinful condition those plans, carried out, would result in his destruc-

tion, that is no reason why the plans should be changed to conform to his condition, but is only a reason why his condition should be changed to conform to the plans; and that may be done at any moment that he will consent to it.

It is thus seen that the decrees of God, against which so many revolt, are nothing but the plans which God formed beforehand in regard to the worlds and beings He intended to bring into existence; and that, so far as we have gone, it is impossible for any one intelligently to call the doctrine in question.

But there is a particular part of the decrees against which special objection is made, and that is the part known as election. But here again, it is believed, that objections are largely due to misapprehension. What is meant by election? The word means choice. God's choice of men; His choice of men to be citizens in His kingdom; His choice of men to be children in His family; His choice of men to be the objects of His favour; His choice of men to be subjects of His saving grace. But can it be possible that any one objects that God thus chooses to bless men? Does any one object that He thus chooses to bring them into His kingdom, and to adopt them into His family, and to make them the subjects of His saving grace? How else are they to obtain these blessings? How are men saved? By the Gospel or by the

law? By grace or by works? By the Lord or by themselves? All Christians answer by the Lord. But if He saves them, must He not first choose to do it? And since that is the most important thing He ever does for them, if anything was in those plans He formed beforehand in regard to them, must not that choice have been in them? And is not that just what the Scriptures plainly teach? "Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world." "Chosen in Him in the beginning."

But a special objection to this doctrine is found in the notion that it limits the Gospel; narrows it; converts it into a sort of little sacred enclosure, a few of the race within; the great majority without, and kept without, no matter how much many of them may desire to get within. But here, as in the other cases, there is a great deal of misapprehension. Election does not limit the Gospel and narrow it. It makes the Gospel. It makes the only Gospel we have to proclaim to the human race. What kind of a Gospel it makes, will be seen presently. Just here the point is, that it makes the only good news we have to make known to a lost world. Let us see if that is not true. Let me raise again the question, How are we saved? In order that we may be saved a number of things must be done for us that we cannot do for ourselves. Our sins must be pardoned. We can-

not do that for ourselves. Our natures must be renewed. We cannot do that for ourselves. We must be adopted into God's family and made His children. We cannot do that for ourselves. After we have been brought into an estate of salvation, "our feet must be kept from falling and our souls from death." We cannot do that for ourselves. A number of other things must be done for us, and finally we must have administered to us an entrance into God's everlasting kingdom. We cannot do that for ourselves. An hour might be spent in pointing out things that must be done for us, if we are to be saved, that we cannot do for ourselves. If they are ever done for us, they must be done for us by the Lord. Well, then, just to the extent that we see in His word that He has a purpose to do these things for men, to that extent, and to that extent only, are there glad tidings to be proclaimed to the world. Can anything be plainer than that? But this purpose on God's part to do these things for men is what is meant by this doctrine of election. Suppose God had no such purpose; suppose He left us entirely to ourselves in this great matter; suppose He left us entirely to ourselves in the blindness of our minds; in the hardness of our hearts; in the deadness of our consciences; in the perversity of our wills; in the corruption of our souls; suppose He left us entirely to ourselves in our pro-

found natural indifference to our spiritual interests and in our supreme attachment to the world and to sin, how many of us would be saved? Suppose He did not do anything to arouse men out of their unconcern and to dispose and enable them to do that on which their salvation depends, would a single individual of the race ever be saved? I repeat, then, just in so far as God has the purpose efficiently to interpose in the behalf of men and do what is necessary to accomplish their salvation, so far, and only so far, is there hope for mankind. This is so plain that it needs not to be pressed farther. But by so much as it is plain, by so much is it plain that election does not limit and narrow the Gospel, but makes it.

But now, what kind of a Gospel does it make? It does not make a little Gospel, a narrow Gospel, but a great Gospel, a wide Gospel, an immeasurably comprehensive Gospel, a Gospel that in the long run of the ages will save a "multitude which no man can number." When we remember that all infants dying in infancy are saved and that half of the human race, perhaps, has died at that period of life; when we remember how many millions have already been saved after they reached years of responsibility by faith; how many more will doubtless be saved in the same way before the millennium shall begin; and when we remember that the

millennium is to last at least a thousand years, and may last much longer, and that during that long period of time the population of the world will be at its maximum; that the surface of the world will be crowded with its teeming multitudes; when we remember that all this immense mass of humanity is to be brought to a knowledge of the truth; that all the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; when we take account of such facts as these, we can begin to form some conception of the extent of God's purpose in the Gospel. It is said that when our Saviour shall in that day for the first time see the "fruit of His labour"; "the purchase of His blood," "He will be satisfied," perfectly and forever satisfied; satisfied, notwithstanding all the humiliation to which He was subjected; satisfied, notwithstanding all the mockery and insults of which He was made the object; satisfied, notwithstanding the fact that His sacred person was cruelly lacerated by the thongs of the dreadful scourge; satisfied, notwithstanding the fact that He was at last arrested as a criminal, and tried as a criminal, and condemned and executed as a criminal between two thieves; satisfied, notwithstanding His infinite love for the race and His desire to see the race saved; when in that day the multitude of the redeemed shall be gathered before Him and about Him,

rising tier on tier, tier on tier, thousands, millions, millions on millions, He will be perfectly and forever satisfied. But how many souls do you think it will take thus perfectly and forever to satisfy Him, and especially His love for the race and His desire to see the race saved? Election, thus, makes a Gospel that in its saving results will perfectly and forever satisfy the Lord Jesus Christ. Is not that a great Gospel, a comprehensive Gospel? It is sometimes said that Calvinists cannot preach much of a Gospel. But can anybody preach a better, a more hopeful Gospel than this? Indeed, is there any other Gospel but this?

It may be said, however, that "this is, indeed, a fine Gospel for the elect, but what sort of a Gospel is it for the non-elect?" It may be answered that this doctrine puts no obstacle in the way of any who desire to be saved. All who desire to be saved are invited to Christ, and if they go, of course they will not be cast out. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." This doctrine, then, does not hinder the salvation of any one who desires the great blessing. But if any one does not desire it; if over and over again he has refused to receive it, when urged on his acceptance, why should he complain that God has not planned to confer upon him what he does not want and what in instances without number he has refused to receive?

Such is some indication of what is meant by these doctrines of Calvinism. These and other doctrines of our creed have had a great history in the world. They have made great and good Christian men and women ; as great and as good Christian men and women as any this world has yet seen. They have made great individual churches ; churches as great and good as any with which the world has yet been favoured. They have made great and good denominations ; denominations as great and good as any with which the world has yet been blessed. They have exerted a mighty influence for good on governments, laws and institutions, as all know who are informed on the subject. But what they have done in the past they can continue to do in the future. Let us teach them in our families, in our Sabbath-schools, in our churches, and in every other way we can, assured that because they are the truths of God, He will honour them and make them effective in taking this revolted world captive and in bringing it back from its distant and reckless wanderings and laying it down at the feet of the great Captain of our salvation as the splendid trophy of His redeeming grace.

XIII

TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR

"Take heed how ye hear."—LUKE viii. 18.

THE text follows closely after the parable of the sower and the seed. In that parable the Saviour tells us that there are a number of different kinds of hearers of the word. He mentions and describes four different kinds, and, perhaps, if He had wished to make His enumeration complete, He might have mentioned and described still more. But what it specially concerns us to observe is, that of all the classes He mentions, only one heard with saving benefit. He thus teaches us that there is great danger that we shall so hear the Gospel that it shall fail to accomplish in us the great purpose for which it has been given. I wish, therefore, to point out some of the dangers to which we are exposed that we may be on our guard against them.

I. We are in danger of listening to the Gospel as simply an intellectual entertainment. There are many persons, who, if the preacher cannot by his ability and learning, his logic and eloquence, make the Gospel an intellectual entertainment, consider themselves excused from go-

ing to the sanctuary on the Sabbath, or, if they go, consider themselves under no obligation to give serious attention to what is said. The question is often asked, why so many, in almost every community, remain away from the churches on the Sabbath, and a number of different answers to the question are given ; but the real reason is plain : they do not go because they do not find in the churches the entertainment they desire. Ask them, and they will tell you so. Now, the preacher must, of course, exert all his powers to the utmost so to present the Gospel as to arrest attention, excite interest, and to impress it on the minds and hearts of his hearers, but not to entertain them, but to stimulate them to the activity on which their salvation depends. If in doing this, there is incidental intellectual enjoyment, no objection is to be made to that ; but there are a number of reasons why intellectual enjoyment should not be made, as so many do make it, a condition of listening to the Gospel.

One is, that it is an offense to God. The Gospel is a divine and an authoritative message from God commanding us at once to cease from our sins, and to receive Christ as our Saviour and to consecrate ourselves to His service ; and when this message comes to us by one of His chosen ministers, it comes by one whom He has called and sent to us for that very purpose. But now, if when such a message as this is sent to us

in such a way as this, we refuse to hear it because it is not made intellectually entertaining to us, what kind of an offense do we commit against God? Suppose that a number of the citizens of this commonwealth were in rebellion against its authority and were imperilling the liberties and lives of their fellow citizens, and that the governor of the commonwealth should send to them a properly accredited messenger, commanding them to cease from their unlawful conduct, and that they should refuse to hear him, and that when afterwards it should be inquired why they had refused to hear him, they should answer, because he did not so deliver his message as to make it intellectually entertaining, what would the authorities think of such a response as that? Would they not regard it as impertinent and insufferable trifling with the government of the commonwealth and would they not in all probability allow the laws to take their course and inflict whatever penalty might be deserved? But when a similar message comes to us from God in a similar way, and we, for a similar reason, treat it in a similar manner, are we not guilty of a similar offense against God, and do we not expose ourselves to similar consequences? It is probable that we can hardly commit a more serious offense against God than to refuse to hear such a message as He sends to us in the Gospel because it is not made the source of intellectual entertainment to us.

Another reason why we should not make it a condition of listening to the Gospel that it shall be made an intellectual entertainment is found in the chief doctrines of the Gospel. The chief doctrines of the Gospel are that we are sinners; lost, ruined and helpless sinners; that on account of our sins we are exposed to the righteous retributions of eternity; that those retributions may be incurred at any moment; that to rescue us from such a doom God has given the blood and life of His own Son; such are some of the chief doctrines of the Gospel. But now, when we demand, as a condition of listening to such doctrines, that they shall be made intellectually entertaining to us, what is the nature of the demand we thus make? Why, we are demanding that we shall be intellectually entertained by being told about our own sins; by being told how many they are, and how great they are, and how inexcusable they are, and how odious and offensive they are to God, and how destructive to our own souls. We are demanding that we shall be intellectually entertained by having adequately described to us the terrors of the eternal doom to which we are exposed. We are demanding that we shall be intellectually entertained by having depicted to us with sufficient vividness the imminence of the peril that that doom may be incurred at any moment. We are demanding that we shall be intellectually enter-

tained by having portrayed to us the humiliation, the mockeries, the insults, the dying agonies and the death of so glorious a being as the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to consider it, what could be more revolting than this? We might be intellectually entertained by being told of the sins of others, and the guilt of others, and the danger of others, and the doom of others. That would be bad enough. But that we should demand to be intellectually entertained by being told about our own sins and our own guilt and our own danger and our own doom, is one of the clear evidences of the moral perversion that has been wrought in our souls by sin. We might well be humiliated by being told about our sins and guilt and threatened doom; we might well be filled with shame and confusion and alarm; but that we should demand to be entertained by being told about them is one of the most absurd and shocking demands we could make.

Still another reason why we should not make it a condition of listening to the Gospel that it shall be made intellectually entertaining to us is that if it be converted into an intellectual entertainment, the danger is that we shall be so taken up with the entertainment that the Gospel itself will be lost sight of. In illustration of this point Dr. Richard Cecil of England once said, "I once went to a physician to get a prescription for a disease from which I was suffering. The

physician was a very entertaining talker and he so entertained me with his conversation that I was in his presence for some time before I recalled the purpose for which I had gone to him. I came near forgetting that I had a disease that required attention. At last, however, I got the prescription I wished in verbal form, and withdrew, but on my way home I was still so absorbed in the intellectual entertainment the physician had afforded me that I forgot what the prescription was. Thus," he said, "by going to that physician I got intellectual entertainment, but I got no remedy for my disease." And, he added, if ministers make the Gospel an intellectual entertainment, their congregations may have entertainment, and sometimes of a high order, but the danger is that they will be so occupied with the entertainment that the Gospel itself will be neglected. Certainly the history of the Church shows that where this has been done, the Gospel has been overlooked and superseded.

Another reason still why we should not make it a condition of listening to the Gospel that it shall be made an intellectual entertainment is that it is absurd. Suppose a man perishing from thirst should refuse a draught of cool fresh water because it was not offered to him in a golden cup ornamented with jewels, or that he should refuse to listen to a needed warning against a threatened danger, because it was not eloquently

expressed, or that he should decline to accept an offered pardon because it was not written with literary elegance. Could there be any folly of its kind greater than that? But how much greater is the folly of the man who, exposed to the doom of the sinner, refuses to listen to the only mode of rescue, because it is not so presented to him as to afford mental enjoyment?

Such are some reasons why we ought not to do, what so many do, and what we, perhaps, have often done, make it a condition of listening to the Gospel that it shall be made an entertainment to us. The Gospel is not intended for our entertainment, but for our salvation. It is no more intended for our entertainment than the cry of "fire" by night to arouse the sleeping inmates of a burning house is intended for their entertainment. It is no more intended for entertainment than the directions of physicians in our hospitals for the sick and dying are intended for their entertainment; and if we convert it into an entertainment, we may confidently expect that God will convert such preaching and such hearing into a judgment, and that the Gospel so preached and so heard will be a "savour of death unto death," instead of a "savour of life unto life."

II. We are in danger of listening to the Gospel without suitable preliminary preparation. If we would engage successfully in any kind of

work, we must have suitable qualifications for it. If we would engage successfully in artistic work, we must have suitable artistic qualifications, and if we would engage successfully in scientific work, we must have suitable scientific qualifications; and so if we would successfully engage in the work of the sanctuary, in hearing the word of God and in calling upon His name and in celebrating His praise, we must have suitable spiritual qualifications. The graces of the Spirit, faith, repentance, love and zeal, must be in exercise. But in how much danger we are of coming to the house of God on the Sabbath with all these graces in a state of inactivity. During all the preceding week we are engaged in secular pursuits. We are encompassed by secular influences; we are associated with secular people; we are seeking secular ends; we are breathing a secular atmosphere, and the result is, at the end of the week, we are in a more or less secular state of mind and heart; and if on Sabbath morning we spend the hours before worship in secular conversation and in secular reading, we come to the house of the Lord in that secular state, and so without those spiritual qualifications that are necessary for a profitable use of the means of grace. And ordinarily it is then too late to secure them. It is not an easy thing to pass at once out of one decided state of mind and heart into another and entirely different state.

It is not an easy thing to pass at once out of a state of deep gloom and despondency into a state of cheerfulness and hope, and so it is not an easy thing to pass out of a decided secular state of mind and heart into that decided spiritual state of mind and heart that alone fits for the successful use of the means of grace in the sanctuary. Ordinarily it cannot be done in just a few minutes. Time is necessary for the purpose, and reading and meditation and prayer. It is, therefore, usually too late to do it after the sanctuary has been reached, and the result is, no doubt, that many on the Sabbath present themselves in the sanctuary without any of those spiritual qualifications on which a successful participation in the worship of the day is entirely dependent ; and this fact accounts in large measure for the paucity of the results.

We are in constant danger of overlooking the fact that if the services are to be successful in accomplishing the great ends they have in view, the people have a part to perform in them as well as the minister, and that it is as difficult for them to perform their part as it is for him to perform his. He must, indeed, read the word of God, but they must hear it read, and it is just as difficult for them to hear it read as they ought as it is for him to read it as he ought. He must read the songs of Zion, but they must sing them ; and it is just as difficult for them to sing them

with the "spirit and the understanding" as it is for him to read them with the "spirit and the understanding." He must lead them in prayer to the throne of grace, but they must follow; and it is just as difficult for them to follow as they ought as it is for him to lead as he ought. He must proclaim the Gospel, but they must listen to the proclamation; and it is just as difficult for them so to listen as to be saved as it is for him so to preach as that they shall be saved. Thus that the services may accomplish the great ends in view, the people have a part to perform in them as certainly as the minister has, and it is just as difficult for them to perform their part as it is for him to perform his part, and, therefore, they need suitable qualifications for performing their part as certainly as he needs suitable qualifications for performing his part. But how often do many come to the house of the Lord without any qualifications for the services; without having made any proper effort to secure such qualifications! We are in great danger, then, of listening to the Gospel without suitable preliminary qualifications.

We are in danger of coming to the sanctuary in a state of passivity instead of a state of activity. We are in danger of coming simply to receive instead of coming to seek. We are in danger of coming that the ordinances may address themselves to us instead of coming to

address ourselves to the ordinances. We are in danger of coming that the truth may lay hold on us instead of coming to lay hold on the truth. We are in danger of coming thus in a passive state of mind and heart instead of coming asking, seeking, knocking, striving to enter in at the straight gate. And this lack of activity on our part accounts for our failure so often to secure the blessings we so much need. When, then, our Saviour warns us to "take heed how we hear," we may be sure He is cautioning us against listening to the Gospel without previously having made that preparation for the duty on which all benefit ordinarily depends.

III. But there is a particular qualification without having which we are in danger of listening to the Gospel, that it may be well to emphasize. We are in danger of listening without suitable earnestness. We insist that the preacher shall be in earnest in preaching to us. We hold that if he is not thoroughly in earnest, he is unworthy of the high office whose duties he is undertaking to discharge; and, however able and learned he may be, we do not care to wait on his ministrations; and we thus judge rightly. But what reason can be given why he should thus be in earnest in preaching that is not an equally good reason why the people should be in earnest in hearing? Ought the preacher be in earnest in preaching because it is the Gospel he is preach-

ing? Ought not the hearers to be equally in earnest in hearing because it is the Gospel they are hearing? Ought the preacher to be in earnest in preaching because preaching the Gospel is solemn work? Ought not the hearers to be in earnest in hearing because hearing the Gospel is equally solemn work? Ought the preacher to be in earnest in preaching because souls are at stake? Ought not the hearers to be equally in earnest in hearing because the souls that are at stake are their own souls? Ought the preacher to be in earnest in preaching because he must give account of his preaching? Ought not the hearers to be equally in earnest in hearing because they must give account of their hearing? Ought the preacher to be in earnest in his preaching because the way in which he preaches is to have to do with his eternal destiny? Ought not the hearers to be equally in earnest in hearing because the way in which they hear is as certainly to have to do with their eternal destiny? What reason can be given, then, why the preacher should be in earnest in preaching that is not an equally good reason why the hearers should not be equally in earnest in hearing? Yet in how much danger we are of appearing in the house of God on the Sabbath without anything of that earnestness by which we ought to be characterized! How often the services are void of spiritual benefit because we

lack this qualification! "To that man will I look," saith the Lord, "who is of an humble and contrite heart and who trembleth at My word;" not to the man who listens listlessly, unconcernedly, drowsily, but who is so much interested in the word and who so appreciates the importance of being rightly affected by it, that he actually secretly trembles lest he shall not hear as he should; to that man the Lord says He will look with saving regard. So important is it to be in earnest in hearing. The man who can in God's house, on God's day, in the presence of God's people, hear God speak, God warn, God threaten, God invite, God command, without secret tremblings of spirit lest he shall not hear as he should, has little reason to expect that he shall receive God's blessing.

IV. We are in danger of listening to the Gospel without any definite and sincere purpose to do what we are taught. Many seem to think that when they have quietly and respectfully listened to a discourse and assented to its truth, they have done about all that it is necessary for them to do. They do not listen with the fixed and honest determination at once to do what is shown to be their duty. Such hearing is almost in vain: what good would the counsels of the best physician do, if not followed, or the advice of the wisest friend, if not taken, and so what good can the most faithful presentations of the Gospel do,

if they are not followed by appropriate corresponding acts? What good can the promises do unless they are embraced, or the warnings unless they are regarded, or the commands unless they are obeyed? What good can it do any one if on the Sabbath he looks into the Gospel glass and then goes away and "straightway forgets what manner of man he is"? Yet there are no doubt multitudes who constantly thus act. There is, perhaps, hardly any danger to which we are more exposed than this, and hardly any sin in connection with listening to the Gospel that more certainly prevents it from accomplishing the ends it has in view.

Such are some of the dangers to which we are exposed in listening to the Gospel, against which the text warns us. Let us guard against them, and then the Gospel will prove to be the power of God and the wisdom of God unto our salvation. Let us not listen to the Gospel for mere entertainment, but for salvation. Let us come to the sanctuary every Sabbath with spiritual qualifications for the duties of the hour; let us come to hear with the same earnestness with which we expect the minister to preach; let us come from our knees to the pew as we expect him to come from his knees to the pulpit; let us come not simply that the ordinances may take hold of us, but to take hold of the ordinances and with a sincere determination to do whatever may

be shown to be our duty, and then the Gospel will have free course among us and be glorified. Then we shall leave the first principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on unto perfection; then we shall lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; then we shall make our calling and election sure, and shall at last have administered unto us an abundant entrance into God's everlasting kingdom.

XIV

CHRIST'S WILLINGNESS TO SAVE

"And him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."
—JOHN vi. 37.

ONE of the most difficult things of which to persuade men is the willingness of Christ to save. They generally believe, indeed, that He has some willingness to save. They generally believe that He came into the world to save sinners; that He died to save sinners; that in a number of instances He has actually saved them. They can usually point to some among their own acquaintances whom they have every reason to believe He has saved. So much as this, then, they readily believe; but it is very difficult to persuade them that much more than this is true, that He is infinitely willing to save every soul that goes to Him.

One evidence that they do not fully appreciate the willingness of Christ to save is found in the fact that they imagine that they are more willing in the great matter than He is. They imagine, many of them, that they are perfectly willing to be saved; to be delivered from the presence and the power and the guilt and all the consequences of their sins, and that the only reason why they

have not already been thus delivered is that Christ has not been willing to interpose in their behalf. But if they saw His willingness as it is revealed in His word, they would see that they could hardly labour under a more unfortunate and mischievous misapprehension than when they imagine that their willingness here exceeds His.

Now, because men do not properly appreciate His willingness to save, and because it is not appreciated by Christians as it should be, your attention is called to this text. You observe that it not only asserts His willingness to save, but asserts it in the most emphatic way : " Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

I. The first proof I present of Christ's willingness to save is found in what He has already done that men may be saved. Let us make a brief and rapid survey of His coming into the world and His earthly work. The first great fact that arrests our attention, as we make this survey, is that although He was God, He condescended to become a man that sinners might be saved. That is one of the most astonishing facts within the range of human knowledge. If it does not so appear to any one, it is because he has never given it proper consideration. That you may see how astonishing it is, consider, if you please, how astonishing it would be if the sun should be reduced to an atom of matter, like

the particles of dust lying on the floor of this room ; or how astonishing it would be if the universe were reduced to a clod, such as may be seen lying on the surface of the fields ; or how astonishing it would be if an archangel were reduced to a worm. Yet that would not be half so astonishing as that God should become a man ; for the distance between the sun and an atom of matter ; between the universe and a clod ; between an archangel and a worm, great as it is, is, after all, only finite, while the distance between God and man is infinite ; and, therefore, though the sun should be reduced to an atom of matter, and the universe to a clod, and an archangel to the meanest worm and be made to crawl in the dust, the reduction, the humiliation, would not be half so great as that which took place when God became a man. But now if He would do that in order that a way of salvation might be devised, how certain it is, the way having been thus devised, He will in no wise cast out any that approach Him by that way !

He, however, not only became a man, but, it is said, He took upon Himself the " likeness of sinful flesh." Now if He had taken upon Himself our nature as Adam possessed it previous to the fall, in all its beauty and perfection as it came fresh from the forming hand of Deity, it would not have been so remarkable. That, however, He did not do ; but He took it upon Himself

after it had been much injured and marred by the fall, with all its liabilities to suffer from cold and heat; hunger and thirst and fatigue. Of course when it is said He took upon Himself "the likeness of sinful flesh," it is not meant that He took upon Himself a flesh actually sinful; but it is meant that He took upon Himself a flesh or a body like to that flesh or those bodies which we have who are sinners, and consequently Himself looked like a sinner. Now this was condescension far beneath that which characterized Him when He became a man, great as that was, as a simple illustration may indicate. John Howard was once called the great philanthropist because he visited many of the prisons of the world and did much to ameliorate the sufferings of the condemned. But how much more of the spirit of true philanthropy would Howard have manifested, if, supposing it had been necessary, he had disguised himself in the felon's garb, and had consented all his lifetime for the felon's sake, himself to be regarded as a felon. Yet that is precisely what our Saviour did for some thirty-three years. "He took on Himself the likeness of sinful flesh;" He took on Himself a flesh or a body like to that flesh or those bodies which we sinners have. He disguised Himself in the sinner's garb and all His lifetime consented for the sinner's sake to look so much like a sinner, that as He moved up and down in the world almost everybody that saw

Him thought He was a sinner and treated Him as such. How surprising it is that God, who is infinitely holy, who hates sin with an infinite hatred and is infinitely jealous of the honour of His great and holy name, should ever have consented for one moment, much less for some thirty-three years, to look like a sinner and to be regarded as a sinner for the sake of sinners! But if He would do that in order that a scheme of salvation might be brought into existence, how certain it is, the scheme having thus been brought into being, He will in no wise refuse an interest in it to any one who sincerely desires it!

But further: He not only became a man and "took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh," that men might be saved, but He became the servant of men. Now, when the great ones of earth, her kings and queens, come down from their thrones and meet and mingle with their subjects; visit them in their humble abodes; talk with them about the simple themes of their daily conversation; sympathize with them in sorrows and minister to them in their trials, it is regarded as so remarkable that the historian does not fail to make conspicuous mention of it in the annals of time. Orators eulogize it in their speech; poets celebrate it in their songs. But here we have the King of kings and the Lord of lords coming down from His throne, not only to meet and mingle with His subjects and visit them in

their humble abodes, and sympathize with them in their sorrows and minister to them in their trials, but to be their servant. "I came into the world," He said, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister;" by which He meant, "I came into the world, not that you might minister to My personal wants, but that I might minister to your personal wants;" and in fulfillment of this humble office that He had taken upon Himself we find Him on one occasion girding Himself with a towel, and taking a basin of water and washing His disciples' feet. What a scene was that! The great God, infinitely exalted above the highest conceptions we can form of Him, stooping down so low as actually to wash the feet of His own sinful creatures! How much He must be interested in us! How willing He must be to do for us anything we need! How certain it is that if we go to Him, He will in no wise cast us out!

Still further: He not only became a man, and "took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh," and became the servant of men, that men might be saved, but He consented at last to be treated as a criminal that that great end might be gained. He consented to be thought a criminal by almost all that saw Him; to be talked about as a criminal; to be arrested as a criminal; to be tried as a criminal; to be spit on as a criminal; to be scourged as a criminal, that is, to be publicly

whipped as a criminal, and finally to be put to death as a criminal between two thieves, as though He were a greater criminal than either of them. That, no doubt, was the most astonishing event ever witnessed in the universe. The God of glory condescending to such a depth of humiliation and shame as to allow Himself to be put to death in the most painful and ignominious manner as a criminal by His own sinful creatures ! No wonder the veil in the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. No wonder the earth quaked and rocks were rent. No wonder there was darkness over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour. No wonder the sun refused to shine on such a scene as that !

Thus we see some things that the Saviour has already done that men may be saved. But if He would do all these things in order that a way of salvation might be provided, what can be more certain than that the way having been thus provided, He will in no wise cast out any who go to Him by that way?

2. Another evidence of His willingness to save is found in the invitations He gives in His word to men to accept His salvation. Having provided salvation in that wonderful way of which we have now some glimpse, He fills His word with invitations to men to come and accept it. Of course if these invitations have any meaning at all, they must be intended to assure

us of His willingness to save. Therefore, the more numerous they are, and the more cordial, and the more comprehensive, the stronger is the assurance they give of His interest in us. If these invitations were very few in number; if we could find them only at great distances apart in His word; or if they were coldly expressed; or if they were fenced about with conditions with which it would be very difficult for us to comply; or if they were addressed to a class of men to which few of us belong, and to which, in the nature of the case, only a few of us could belong; or if they were addressed to a state of mind which few of us have, and which, in the nature of the case, only a few of us could have; if these were the facts in regard to these invitations, then would they furnish us little evidence of a disposition to interpose in our behalf. But when the facts are just the contrary of these; when these invitations are so numerous that we may find them in some form on almost every page of the book; when they are as cordially expressed as the human mind can conceive; when they have no condition except that one condition that every invitation must have that it shall be accepted; when they are addressed to no particular class of men, but to whosoever will; and when they are addressed to no state of mind except to that state which is willing to attend to them and accept them; when these are facts in regard to

these invitations, they give us as much encouragement to go to Him as we could reasonably ask. If any one is not satisfied with these invitations, let him construct one that would be satisfactory to him. Let him make it as free and as full and as cordial and as comprehensive as he can devise, and I will point him to a number in the Scriptures as free and as full and as cordial and as comprehensive as the freest and fullest and most cordial and comprehensive that he can construct. Do you want an invitation so comprehensive that you may be sure that you are embraced in its wide compass? There are a number in the Scriptures, as for instance, "The Spirit and the Bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Can you conceive of an invitation that would more certainly include you than that invitation does, if you desire to be saved? Why, if you had an invitation addressed to your own name and to your present place of residence, you could not be so certain that it was intended for you as you may be that that invitation is intended for you, for while there may have been no one of your name in the past living just where you now do, there might be such a one in the future, and, therefore, you could not be sure but that the invitation might be intended for him instead of yourself; but when the invita-

tion is to "whosoever is willing," and you are conscious that you are willing, you know that it is your privilege to accept it. Richard Baxter, it is said, thanked God that the invitations of the Scriptures were not addressed to Richard Baxter, for he did not know how many Richard Baxters there were in the world ; and, therefore, they might be intended for some other Richard Baxter instead of for himself ; but he rejoiced that they were addressed to "whosoever is willing," for he was conscious that he was willing, and therefore was sure that it was his privilege to embrace them. The invitations, then, are a strong proof of Christ's willingness to save.

Yet, free and full and comprehensive as they are, it may be that some are not satisfied with them. You may say that much as may be said in their favour, they nevertheless have conditions connected with them with which you find it impossible to comply. You may say, "They invite me to go to Christ, and I have often tried to go ; I have exerted myself to the utmost to draw near to Him, and yet, after all my efforts, have seemed to be as far away from Him as I was when those efforts began, and I would like to have an invitation that has not that condition connected with it." Or you may say, "He invites me to call upon Him, and I have often tried to call ; I have lifted up my voice to the throne of His grace with all the earnestness I

could command; yet my prayers have seemed to rise no higher than my head, but to have wasted away in the empty air around me, and I would like to have an invitation that has not that condition connected with it." Or you may say, "I am invited to look to Him, and I have often strained my eyes in the direction in which I supposed Him to be; yet I have never been able to catch any glimpse of His person that gave peace to my mind or comfort to my heart; and I so much wish I had an invitation that did not have that condition connected with it. The invitations are very free and full and cordial, but they have these conditions connected with them with which I have found myself unable to comply; and I so much wish there were invitations free from these conditions." Thus some may not be satisfied with these invitations and may want easier terms than they prescribe. Evidently, however, they are asking a great deal. When God offers us salvation on terms so simple and easy that we shall simply go to Him for it, that is, lift up to Him for it the sincere desires of our heart; or ask Him for it, or look to Him for it, it would seem that He was offering it to us on terms as simple and as easy as could be expected; as could be desired. Yet He complies with the wish to have the conditions of salvation made still simpler and easier, and He says to the sinner, in substance at least,

“If you can't come to Me; if you can't call upon Me; if you can't even look to Me; if you are spiritually so feeble that you can't do any of these things, why, then, just remain where you are and as you are, and let Me come to you and you shall be saved.” You remember that the Apostle Paul says in his epistle to the Romans that the reason why the Jews were not saved was that they insisted on “going about to establish their own righteousness and would not submit to the righteousness of God,” thus teaching this comforting truth that if we will only submit to that righteousness; if when Christ comes to us and offers to invest us with it, we will only consent that it shall be done, He will do it, and our salvation shall thus be accomplished; that is, He is so willing to save, that, if we will consent to it, He will, as it were, reverse the usual process, and, instead of waiting for us to go to Him, He will come to us and bestow His great salvation upon us. The fact here is that the Saviour's offer in its lowest analysis is to bestow His salvation on any one who will consent to receive it. “Behold,” He says, “I stand at the door and knock; if any man will open unto Me, I will come in and sup with him and he with Me,” and at this moment He is knocking at the door of every mind and heart in this assembly; knocking by His word and by His Spirit and by all the sacred influences of the sanctuary. What

is keeping Him out? No material door such as open into this room. All that is keeping Him out is the failure of our wills to consent that He shall come in. If we give our consent, the moment we give it, He will enter in and the work of salvation shall begin. Thus He is so willing to save that He will save if only we shall give our consent that He shall do it. Could He offer salvation on terms any simpler and easier than that?

Some, however, may not yet be satisfied. You may now say that you are convinced from what has been said that, as a general proposition, it is true that He will not cast out any that go to Him; but that general propositions have their exceptions and that, therefore, this general proposition may have its exceptions, and that if it has its exceptions, you are afraid you may be among its exceptions, and that you are afraid you may be among the exceptions because you have been so long a sinner and so great a sinner; and that what you wish now to know is whether the statement of the text is simply a general proposition that may have its exceptions, or whether it is a universal proposition that has no exceptions. The text seems to have been written to meet a difficulty of this kind; and, therefore, it does not read, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will not cast out." That might be a general proposition that had its exceptions; but it reads, "Him

that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out ;” and that is a universal proposition that can have no exceptions. The text is thus so general that it includes everybody ; so particular that it excludes nobody. Indeed, our translation of the text, excellent as it is, may not quite bring out the whole of the Gospel contained in it ; for the verb “cometh” is, in the original, of course in the present tense, and, therefore, might be rendered, “Him that is coming ; him that is still at a great distance off ; him that like the prodigal is still in a far country ; him that is just beginning to think about arising and returning to his father’s house ; him that is in the earliest incipency of a sincere purpose to arise up and return to his father’s house ; even him I will in no wise cast out.” That may be more nearly the full meaning of the text ; and it is asserted in the original with peculiar emphasis ; for in the original there are two negatives, and in that language two negatives in a sentence do not convert it into an affirmation, as they do in ours, but only emphasize the negation, so that it might be read, “Him that is coming unto Me, I will never, no never, cast out.”

But some may not yet be satisfied. You may say that you are now convinced that it is universally true that Christ will in no wise cast out any that go to Him as they *ought* ; but that there is your difficulty. You cannot go as you ought.

You may say, "I have often tried to go as I ought and have never succeeded. I have tried to go with the faith I ought, and never have been able to do that. I have tried to go with the repentance I ought, and have never been able to do that;" and you may ask what encouragement there is for you in your inability thus to go as you ought. I answer that if you sincerely desire to be saved; if you know what salvation is, that it is not only deliverance from the consequences of sin, but from sin itself, and if you sincerely desire that salvation, there is a great deal of encouragement for you; for as I look through these pages I do not find a single instance in which any sinner ever went to Christ just as he ought. Take the case of that afflicted woman who in a great crowd approached the Saviour saying to herself, "If I may but touch the hem of His garment I shall be made whole." She did not go to Him just as she ought. She seems to have had so imperfect an appreciation of His willingness to bless that she thought it was useless to attempt to interrupt Him in His intercourse with others and ask His attention to a case so humble as her own, and, therefore, she sought to obtain the blessing she wished by simply touching His clothes. Besides, she seems to have imagined that the Saviour did not bestow His blessings by a volition of His will, but by virtue of some sort of magical influence that resided in His person

and that diffused itself upon those who came into physical contact with Him, for she seems to have thought that she could secure the blessing she wished by simply touching Him and without His knowledge. Thus, instead of going to Him just as she ought, we have in her case a sort of clandestine and half-superstitious approach. Yet her heart was in it, and therefore she got what she sought. Take the case of that distressed father who went to the Saviour to have his son delivered from bondage to an evil spirit that had taken possession of him. The Saviour said to him, "If thou canst believe. All things are possible to him that believeth." He thus saw that the Saviour was making the deliverance of his son dependent on his faith; and we may be sure he tried to believe; and he said, "I believe;" but his faith was so weak that he was afraid that he had thus said what was not true, and so he at once half-way took it back by adding, "Help my unbelief." Now he did not go to the Saviour just as he ought. He had so little faith that he was not sure he had any. Yet because he had some faith; "faith as a grain of mustard seed;" he was not rejected, but obtained the blessing he desired. Take one more case, the case of Nicodemus, who went to the Saviour by night because he feared the Jews. We might very naturally have expected the Saviour to say to him, "He that confesseth Me before men, him will I

confess before the Father and the holy angels ; but he that denieth Me before men, as you are now doing by coming to Me under cover of darkness because you are afraid of your countrymen, him will I deny before My Father and the holy angels." That, however, He did not do. He saw that timid as Nicodemus was, he was sincerely seeking the truth, and therefore He announced to him some of the most important truths that ever fell from His lips. Thus we see that no sinner ever went to Him just as he ought to have gone ; and thus we are taught this most comforting truth that no matter how we may go to Him ; no matter what defects may attach themselves to the manner of our going, He will in no wise cast us out provided we really go. We cannot go to Him in a perfect way because we are not perfect beings. What we have to do, then, is to go to Him in any way we can, assured that if we actually go, no matter how imperfect the going may be, He will not refuse to receive us.

But some may have a still further difficulty with the text. You may say that you observed that when the passage of Scripture was read from which the text is taken, it is said in the very verse in which the text is found, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out." There, you may say, "is that dreadful doctrine of election.

How, therefore, after all, may I be sure that if I go to Him He will not cast me out, unless I know I am one of those whom the Father hath given Him? Does not that doctrine limit the assurance of the text and confine it to those whom the Father hath given Him?" You may imagine thus that that doctrine puts an insuperable obstacle in the way of your approach to Him. I remark, therefore, that if you really wish to be saved, it puts no obstacle in your way whatever. Suppose that a number of the citizens of this commonwealth, yourselves amongst the number, had so seriously violated the laws of the commonwealth, that you had all been condemned to death, and that your lives were now at the mercy of the executive of the commonwealth, and that he should issue a proclamation in regard to you, and that in that proclamation he should say, "Some of you I intend to pardon; others I do not," keeping the names, however, of both parties a secret of state; and then suppose he should add, "Nevertheless, whosoever shall come to me at the Capitol of the state, I will pardon." Would you have any difficulty about going? Would you say that the fact that he said "some he would pardon, some he would not," put a difficulty in the way of your going? Why, if you had any apprehensions on that account, you would put his proclamation in your pocket and when you reached his presence, you would read

it to him, and he would be obliged to pardon you or forfeit his veracity before the whole state. Well, as I understand it, this illustrates our case as it stands before God. We have all sinned against Him and are all condemned to death. He teaches in His word that some He intends to save ; some He does not, keeping the names of both classes as one of those secrets that belong unto the Lord. At the same time, however, He gives the assurance contained in the text, and in many other passages of His word, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." How is there any difficulty, then, about going to Him if we really wish to go? Why, if any of us are afraid that this doctrine of election is in the way of our salvation, we may go into our prayer closets and open our Bibles at some such passage as the text, and we may kneel down before the Lord, and put our finger on it, and read it to Him, and there is no irreverence in saying that He stands pledged before the universe to receive us and to fulfill His promise that He will in no wise cast us out. If anybody objects to the illustration and says suppose all should go, what then would become of His declaration, "some I will pardon ; some I will not," I answer, and I beg you to remember the answer, that is God's difficulty. You let God take care of His own difficulties. It is infinite presumption on our part to suppose that God cannot so take care of all

the difficulties arising out of what He says in His word as not perfectly and forever to fulfill it all.

3. Another proof of the willingness of Christ to save is found in the commands He gives us to come to Him. These commands indicate a greater willingness on His part to save than even His invitations do. His invitations assure us that He has provided salvation, and that if we will only come to Him, He will bestow it upon us. That is, His invitations indicate a willingness on His part to save that makes it our privilege to come to Him and to be saved. But His commands indicate a willingness to save that goes far beyond that. They indicate a willingness to save that makes it our duty to come to Him and to be saved. Is He not willing that we shall do our duty? He makes it our duty to read His word. Is He not willing for us to do that? He makes it our duty to keep His day holy. Is He not willing for us to do that? He makes it our duty to keep the law He gave from Mount Sinai. Is He not willing for us to do that? But He also makes it our duty to come to Him and be saved; and this is the chief of all the duties He imposes upon us, for until this duty is performed, no other duty can be performed acceptably. Can it be possible, then, that if any one of us goes to Him in the performance of this duty, He will in any wise

cast us out? Ought not a consideration like this to inspire faith in the most doubting mind and heart?

4. There is time to mention only one more evidence of His willingness to save. It is found in the experience of all those who have gone to Him. You can easily see that no matter what He might do to provide a plan of salvation; no matter what invitations He might give us to come and accept it, and no matter what commands He might lay upon us to come, if those who went did not meet with that reception that all this warranted them to expect, we still would lack satisfactory evidence of His perfect willingness to save. But men have been going to Him ever since the world began; all classes have gone to Him; the young have gone and the old have gone; Jews have gone and Gentiles have gone; the least sinners have gone and the greatest have gone, and no one of them has ever met with any other reception than such assurances as the text entitled him to anticipate. Indeed, they have found that the half had not been told them about His willingness to save.

Thus the evidence is complete. He provides salvation in that wonderful way of which we have had some account. He fills His word with the most cordial and comprehensive invitations to come and receive it. He even goes so far as to command men to come, and when they go, every

one is accorded that very reception which all this warranted him to expect.

In view of this truth, I make in conclusion just one remark. If we perish, when Christ is so willing to save, it will be exclusively our own fault. Some of us may have imagined hitherto that if we should perish, while it would be largely our own fault, it would to some extent be also God's fault, for if He had only been more willing to save, we would have been encouraged to seek salvation at His hands. But we now see that He is so willing to save, that if we perish the fault will rest on ourselves alone ; and the knowledge of this fact will forever be the bitterest element in the cup of our sorrow. It will engender within us that most dreadful feeling of which the soul is subject, the feeling of remorse ; a feeling of such a sort that it will cause us forever to cast ourselves out of even our own esteem ; to refuse to ourselves forever even our own pity, and to fly the walls of our dark prison-house forever around in the vain effort to escape from ourselves. One of the most remarkable men that Virginia ever produced startled those who were gathered about his dying bed by uttering that word. "Remorse ! remorse ! Show me that word in the dictionary," he said to his physician. The physician complied with his request, but perhaps his failing vision prevented him from distinctly seeing it. At any rate, he told him to

write it down on a card ; on both sides of the card and to underscore it. The physician again complied with his request and handed it to him. A lady told me not long ago that she had seen that card. After he had gazed at it a while, he turned to the physician and said to him, "Ah, sir, you do not know what that word means." But if we perish when God is willing to save, we shall know what that word means. We shall spend a whole eternity in exploring the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of its awful significance. Why should we prepare for ourselves such a doom as that? Seeing that Christ is so willing to save, why should we not go to Him at once and escape such a fate as that?