

EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX :

AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF
THE CHARACTER AND EXERCISES
OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE



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P R E F A C É.

A CONSIDERABLE portion of the Sacred Volume (as the Books of Psalms and Canticles in the Old Testament, and a large part of the several Epistles in the New Testament) is occupied with the interesting subject of Christian Experience; and exhibits its character, under different dispensations of religion, and diversified with an endless variety of circumstances, as ever essentially the same. As the same features of countenance and elevation of stature have always marked the human species in the midst of the creation of God; so an identity of feature and "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" has, in all ages, and under every shade of outward difference, distinguished the family of God as "the people that should dwell alone, and should not be reckoned among the nations."¹ This indeed was to have been expected. Human nature has undergone no change since the fall. In its unrenewed state it is still captivated in the same chains of sin; and, when renewed, it is under the influence of the same Spirit of grace. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."² We might therefore have conceived, that the modern believer, when employed in tracing the records of Patriarchal or Mosaiical experience, will mark in the infirmities of the an-

¹ Numbers xxiii. 9.

² John iii. 6.

cient people of God a picture of his own heart, “ answering, as in water face answereth to face ; ” ¹ and in comparing their external exercises with his own, will be ready to acknowledge—“ All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” ²

In this view, it is the object of this work to exhibit an Old Testament believer in a New Testament garb, as one “ walking in the same spirit, and in the same steps ” with ourselves ; and, in bringing his features of character to the Evangelical standard, it is presumed, that the correspondence will be found to be complete. “ Faith which worketh by love ” ³—the fundamental distinction of the Gospel—pervades the whole man ; with at least an implied reference to the one way of access to God, ⁴ and a distinct regard alike to the promises, ⁵ and to the precepts, ⁶ of Divine revelation. Nor are the workings of this principle delineated with less accuracy. In all the variety of Christian feelings and holy conduct, we observe its operations leading the soul into communion with God, and moulding every part into a progressive conformity to his image. When we view the “ man after God’s own heart ”—taking God for his portion ⁷—associating with his people, ⁸ and feeding upon his word ; ⁹ when we mark his zeal for his Master’s glory ; ¹⁰—his devotedness ¹¹ and self-denial ¹² in his Master’s work—when we see him ever ready to confess his name, ¹³ to bear his reproach, ¹⁴ and caring only to answer it by a more steady adherence to his

¹ Prov. xxvii. 19.

³ Gal. v. 6.

⁵ Verses 25, 32, 49, 74, 169, 170.

⁷ Verse 57.

¹⁰ Verse 139.

¹³ Verses 45, 46, 115, 172.

² 1 Cor. xii. 11.

⁴ Verses 41, 83, 132, 135

⁶ Verses 66, 166.

⁹ Verses 47, 48, 97, 111.

¹² Verse 62.

¹⁴ Verses 23, 69, 87, 141.

service¹—do we not in those lineaments of character recognize the picture of one, who in after times could turn to the churches of Christ, and say, “Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me?”² Or can we recollect the Psalmist’s insight into the extent and spirituality of the law of God,³ and his continual conflict with indwelling sin⁴—awakening in him the spirit of wrestling prayer,⁵ and confidence in the God of his salvation⁶—and not be again forcibly reminded of him, who has left upon record the corresponding history of his own experience—“We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin: I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”⁷ In short let his instancy in prayer⁸ and praise⁹ be remembered—his determined¹⁰ and persevering¹¹ cultivation of heart religion¹² and practical holiness,¹³ his hungering and thirsting after righteousness;¹⁴ his jealous fear¹⁵ and watchful tenderness¹⁶ against sin, and regard for the honour of his God;¹⁷ his yearning compassion over his fellow-sinners;¹⁸ his spiritual taste;¹⁹ his accurate discernment;²⁰ the “simplicity” of his dependence,²¹ and the godly “sincerity” of his obedience,²² his

¹ Verses 51, 78, 157.

² Verse 96. •

³ Verses 25, 28.

⁴ Rom. vii. 9, 14, 24, 25.

⁵ Verse 164.

⁶ Verses 44, 102, 112.

⁷ Verses 106, 167, 168.

⁸ Verse 161.

⁹ Verse 39. •

¹⁰ Verses 103, 140.

¹¹ Verses 8, 10, 86, 116, 117. •

² 1 Cor. iv. 16.

³ Verses 113, 163.

⁶ Verses 114, 176.

⁸ Verses 145—149.

¹⁰ Verses 5, 36, 80.

¹² Verses 30—32, 59, 60.

¹⁴ Verses 20, 40, 131, 174.

¹⁶ Verses 11, 37, 133.

¹⁸ Verses 53, 136, 153.

²⁰ Verses 98—100, 101, 129, 130.

²² Verses 104, 128.

peace of mind and stability of profession ;¹ his sanctified improvement of the cross ;² his victory over the world ;³ his acknowledgment of the Lord's mercy ;⁴ his trials of faith and patience ;⁵ his heavenly liberty in the ways of God ;⁶ his habitual living in his presence,⁷ and under the quickening,⁸ restraining,⁹ directing,¹⁰ and supporting¹¹ influence of his word—let these holy exercises be considered—either separately, or as forming one admirable concentration of Christian excellence—and what do we desire more to complete the portrait of a finished servant of God upon the Evangelical model? Is not this a visible demonstration of the power of the word, in “perfecting the man of God, and furnishing him thoroughly unto all good works?”¹²

Having explained the Evangelical character of this Psalm, some notice may next be taken of its peculiar adaptation to Christian experience. The several graces of the Scriptural system, delineated in this Psalm, form an excellent touchstone of the sincerity of our profession, by marking its practical influence in our daily walk and conversation :—a touchstone which appears especially needful in this day of profession ; not—as warranting our confidence in the Saviour, or as constituting in any measure our ground of acceptance with God ; but as exciting us to “give diligence to make our calling and election sure,”¹³ and tending to quicken our sluggish steps in the path of self-denying obedience. The writer is free to confess, that his main design in the study of this Psalm was to furnish

¹ Verse 165.

³ Verses 14, 36, 72, 127, 162.

⁵ Verses 81—83, 107, 123.

⁷ Verse 168.

⁹ Verse 101.

¹¹ Verses 92, 143.

¹³ 2 Peter i. 10.

² Verses 67, 71, 75.

⁴ Verses 64, 65, 68.

⁶ Verses 32, 45.

⁸ Verses 50, 93.

¹⁰ Verses 9, 24, 30, 105.

¹² 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

his own mind with a correct standard of Evangelical sincerity in the habitual scrutiny of his own heart; and if, in the course of this Exposition, any suggestion should be thrown out, to call the attention of his fellow-christians to this most important, but alas! too much neglected, duty, he will have reason to "rejoice in the day of Christ, that he has not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."¹ Never let it be supposed, that a diligent, prayerful, probing examination of the "chambers of imagery," "gendereth unto bondage." Invariably will it be found to open the way to a more established enjoyment of Scriptural assurance. "*Hereby*, we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."² As therefore the preceptive part of the gospel thus becomes our guide in the happy path of filial obedience, our beloved rule of duty, and the standard of our daily progress: we shall learn in the use of it to depend more entirely upon the Saviour, fresh energy will be put into our prayers, and the promises of pardon and grace will be doubly precious to our souls.

It cannot then be, that these views of the Divine life should be found unfriendly to the best happiness of man-

¹ 'I know of no part of the Holy Scriptures' (remarks a profound divine) 'where the nature and evidences of true and sincere godliness are so fully and largely insisted on and delineated as in the 119th Psalm. The Psalmist declares his design in the first verses of the Psalm, keeps his eye on it all along, and pursues it to the end. The excellence of holiness is represented as the immediate object of a spiritual taste and delight. God's law—that grand expression and emanation of the holiness of God's nature and prescription of holiness to the creature—is all along represented as the great object of the love, the complacence, and the rejoicing of the gracious nature, which prizes God's commandments "above gold, yea, the finest gold;" and to which they are "sweeter than the honey and the honey-comb."'—*Edwards on Religious Affections*, Part iii. sect. iii. 'The ordinary and serious breathing of my soul (observes a deeply spiritual thinker), 'is such' as that of the Psalmist throughout the 119th Psalm.'—*Holyburton's Life*.

² 1 John iii. 19, with 18, 20, 21.

kind. We observe this Psalm to open with a most inviting picture of blessedness, and to describe throughout the feelings of one, encompassed indeed with trials super-added to the common lot of men, but yet evidently in possession of a satisfying portion—of a “joy, with which a stranger does not intermeddle.”¹ Of those, therefore, who would affix the stigma of melancholy to evangelical religion, we are constrained to remark, that they “understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”² The children of Edom have never tasted the “clusters of Canaan,” and cannot therefore form any just estimate of that goodly land. They that have spied the land can bring a good report of it, and can tell them—“Surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it.”³ “The work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”⁴

The structure of this Psalm is peculiar—divided into twenty-two parts—agreeing with the number of the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet—each part, and its several verses, beginning with the corresponding letter of the Alphabet.⁵ The whole Psalm is in the form of an ejaculatory address, with the exception of the first three verses, which may almost be considered as the preface to the whole, and one other verse in the course of it, where the man of God rebukes the ungodly from his presence, as if intruding into his “hiding-place,” and interrupting his communion with his God.⁶ It is not always easy to trace the connexion

¹ Proverbs xiv. 10.

² 1 Timothy i. 7.

³ Numbers xiii. 27.

⁴ Isaiah xxii. 17.

⁵ *Intelligimus ideo per literas Hebræorum, Psalmum hunc esse digestum, ut homo noster, tanquam parvulus, et ab infantia per literarum elementa formatus, quibus ætas puerilis assuevit, usque ad maturitatem virtutis exerceat.*—*Ambrose.*

⁶ Verse 115, with 113, 114.

between the several verses; at least not beyond the several divisions of the Psalm. Probably nothing more was intended, than the record of the exercises of his own heart at different periods, and under different circumstances. If, however, they are not links on the same chain, in continuous and unbroken dependence—they may at least be considered as pearls upon one string, of equal though independent value. The prominent characteristic of the Psalm is a love for the word of God, which is brought before us under no less than ten different names,¹ referring to some latent and distinguishing properties of the Divine word, whose manifold excellences and perfections are thus illustrated with much elegant variety of diction.² In many instances, however, the several terms appear to have been varied, to adapt themselves to the metre; while, perhaps, at other times they may be promiscuously used for the whole revelation of God;³ that the view of its inexhaustible fulness might thus conciliate a more attentive regard to its authority; and might add fresh strength to the obligation to read, believe, love, and live in it.

If the Writer may be permitted to suggest the method in which this Exposition may be best studied to advantage, he would beg to refer to the advice of the excellent

¹ Such as way, law, judgments, words, statutes, commandments, precepts, testimonies, righteousness, truth.

² Rev. T. H. Horne's Introduction to Scripture, vol. ii. 536.

³ As a proof of the promiscuous and extended application of those terms, whose definite sense is restricted to particular parts of revelation—we may mark the use of the word "law" applied by our Saviour to quotations from the book of Psalms. Compare John xv. 25, with Psalm xxxv. 16; lxix. 4; also John x. 34, with Psalm lxxxii. 6. 'Under this word—"law"—Calvin observes—"there is no doubt, but that David comprehended the sum of all the doctrine, which God gave to his church.' Sermons on Psalm cxix. verse 153. Compare Psalm xix. 7. marg.

Philip Henry to his children—that they should ‘take a verse of Psalm cxix. every morning to meditate upon, and so go over the Psalm twice in a year:’ ‘and *that*’—said he—‘will bring you to be in love with all the rest of the Scripture.’¹ The writer does not presume to suppose, that this superficial sketch will supply food for meditation year after year. Yet he ventures to hope, that it may have its use, in directing the attention from time to time to a most precious portion of Holy Writ; which, however unfruitful it may have proved to the undiscerning mind, will be found by the serious and intelligent reader to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, in righteousness.”²

¹ P. Henry’s Life, Williams’s Edition, p. 247. In conformity with this rule, we find his godly daughter writing thus in her diary:—1687, 8, March 9, Friday morning. I have been of late taking some pains to learn by heart Psalm cxix. and have made some progress therein.’ Extracted from Mrs. Savage’s MSS. in P. Henry’s Life—Ditto. As an illustration of the view given by this excellent man of the importance of this Psalm, an Index is added to this work of the several matters more or less touched upon; to which, as well as to the texts referred to throughout the work, the reader’s attention is invited.

² 2 Tim. iii. 16. Bishop Cowper sweetly calls it—‘a Holy Alphabet—so plain that children may understand it—so rich and instructive that the wisest and most experienced may learn every day something from it. Added to this and other testimonies before given, we give the remarks of a deeply experimental and solid divine:—‘I am now,’ writes the Rev. H. Venn to one of his correspondents—‘upon the point of expounding the 119th Psalm, which I never did go through; yet I know not any part of Scripture much more profitable. In that Psalm the whole inner man is delineated, and the several changing frames of our poor hearts, and the several blessed motions and inspirations of the Holy Spirit are touched in a very affecting manner. This is the Psalm I have often had recourse to, when I could find no spirit of prayer in my own heart, and at length the fire was kindled, and I could pray. What has been your experience regarding this extraordinary Psalm? I know you do not read the Scriptures idly, and without self-application. Have you not found it pleasant and nourishing to your soul, and fastening upon your mind.’—(Life and Corres-

The composition of this work has been diversified, with as much variety as the nature of the subject would allow. The descriptive character of the book will be found to be interspersed with matter of discussion, personal address, hints for self-inquiry, and occasional supplication, with the earnest endeavour to cast the mind into that meditative, self-scrutinizing, devotional frame, in which the new creature is strengthened, and increases, and goes on to perfection. Such, however, as the work is, the writer would commend it to the gracious consideration of the great Head of the Church; imploring pardon for what in it may be his own, and a blessing on what may be traced to a purer source:—and in giving both the pardon and the blessing, may his holy name be abundantly glorified.¹

ponde, p. 410.) Identical with this representation was the use and blessing which H. Martyn found in this Psalm.—‘found some devotion in learning some of the 119th Psalm.—In the evening grew better by reading Psalm 119, which generally brings me into a spiritual frame of mind. My mind was beginning to sink into discontent at my unprofitableness; but by reading some of Psalm 119, and prayer, I recovered.’ Again in a fretful frame—‘It was not till I learnt some of Psalm 119 that I could return to a proper spirit.’ Again—‘The 119th Psalm was very solemnizing.’—See his interesting Journals, just published, vol. pp. 75, 114, 118, 175, 193, 194.—*Note to Thirteenth Edition.*

¹ Domine Deus, quæcunque dixi de tuo, agnoscant et tui. Siqua de meo, et tu ignosce et tui.—August. Lib. 15. de Trin.

Old Newton Vicarage.
July 20th, 1827.

PREFACE TO THE TENTH EDITION.

THE Writer readily acknowledges the kind indulgence with which his work has been received by the Church of Christ. Oh! may his God and Saviour have all the glory, while he is humbled in thankfulness for the high privilege of leading his fellow-sinners into the "ways of pleasantness and peace," and of ministering to the spiritual edification of the family of God.

The numerous alterations and additions in the later editions have not, it is hoped, altogether failed in giving increased perspicuity to the style, and fulness of evangelical statement to the matter. The Writer has desired, that every page should be lighted up with the beam of the "Sun of Righteousness," who is the glory of the Revelation of God—the Christian's "All in all." He has endeavoured to illustrate true religion, as the work of the Divine Spirit, grounded on the knowledge of Christ, advancing in communion with him, and completed in the enjoyment of Him, and of the Father by Him. He has also aimed to elevate the standard of Christian privilege, as flowing immediately from Him: by giving such a Scriptural statement of the doctrine of assurance, as may quicken the slothful to greater diligence in their holy profession, and at the same time encourage the weak and fearful to a clearer apprehension of their present salvation.

Old Newton, Jan. 14, 1834.

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM CXIX.

PART I.

1. *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.*

THIS most interesting and instructive Psalm, like the Psalter itself, ‘opens with a Beatitude for our comfort and encouragement, directing us immediately to that happiness, which all mankind in different ways are seeking and inquiring after. All would secure themselves from the incursions of misery; but all do not consider that misery is the offspring of sin, from which therefore it is necessary to be delivered and preserved, in order to become happy or “*blessed.*”’¹

The *undefiled* character described in this verse marks, in an evangelical sense, “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”²—not one who is without sin, but one who in the sincerity of his heart can say—“that which I do I allow not.”³ As his *way* is, so is his “*walk*”—“*in the law of the Lord.*” He is “strengthened in the Lord, and he walks up and down in his name”⁴—

¹ Bp. Horne on Psalm i. 1.

² John i. 47. Comp. Acts xxiv. 16.

³ Rom. vii. 15.

⁴ Zech. x. 12.

his "ears hearing a word behind him, saying—'This is the way, walk ye in it'—when he is turning to the right hand or to the left."¹ And if the pardon of sin, imputation of righteousness,² the communion of saints, and a sense of acceptance with God;³—if protection in providence and grace,⁴ and finally and for ever the beatific vision,⁵ are connected in the promises of God and the experience of his people with *the way* of God; then there can be no doubt that "*blessed are the undefiled in the way.*" And if temporal prosperity,⁶ spiritual renovation and fruitfulness,⁷ increasing illumination,⁸ intercourse with the Saviour,⁹ peace within,¹⁰ and throughout eternity a right to the tree of life,¹¹ are privileges of incalculable value; then surely "*the walk in the law of the Lord*" is "the path of pleasantness and peace." "Truly"—indeed may we say—"God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."¹²

But let each of us ask—What is the "*way*" of my heart with God? Is it always an "*undefiled way*?" Is "iniquity" never "regarded in the heart?" Is all that God hates habitually lamented, abhorred, forsaken? "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."¹³

Again—What is my "*walk*?" Is it from the living principle of union with Christ? This is the direct—the only source of spiritual life. We are first quickened in him. Then we walk in him and after

¹ Isa. xxx. 21. ² Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, with Rom. iv. 6—8.

³ 1 John i. 7. ⁴ 2 Chron. xvi. 9. Job i. 8, 10. ⁵ Matt. v. 8.

⁶ Josh. i. 7, 8. 1 Tim. iv. 8. 2 Chron. xvii. 4, 5.

⁷ Ps. i. 2, 3. ⁸ John vii. 17. ⁹ Ib. xiv. 23; xv. 14, 15.

¹⁰ Ver. 165. Gal. vi. 16. Isa. xxxii. 17. ¹¹ Rev. xxii. 14.

¹² Psalm lxxiii. 1.

¹³ Ib. cxxxix. 23, 24.

VERSE 2.

him. Oh! that this my walk may be steady, consistent, advancing! Oh! that I may be ever listening to my Father's voice—"I am the almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect!"¹

Surely there is enough of defilement in the most "*undefiled way*," and enough of inconsistency in the most consistent "*walk*," to endear to us the gracious declaration of the gospel—"If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous."²

2. *Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.*

THE "testimony," in the singular number, usually denotes the whole canon of the inspired writings—the revelation of the will of God to mankind—the standard of their faith.³ "*Testimonies*" appear chiefly, to mark the preceptive part of Scripture⁴—that part, in which this man of God always found his spiritual delight and perfect freedom. Mark his language: "*I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*"⁵ Not however that this blessedness belongs to the mere outward act of obedience;⁶ but rather to that practical habit of mind, which seeks to know the will of God in order to "*keep*" it. This habit is under the influence of the promise of God—"I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do

¹ Gen. xvii. 1.

² 1 John ii. 1.

³ Comp. Isa. viii. 20.

⁴ Ver. 138.

⁵ Verses 14, 111.

⁶ *Treasur: up his Testimonies.*—Bp. Horsley.

them.”¹ And in thus “*keeping the testimonies of God,*” the believer maintains the character of one that “*seeks him with the whole heart.*”

Oh! how many seek, and seek in vain, for no other reason, than because they do not “*seek him with the whole heart.*” The worldling’s “heart is divided; now shall he be found faulty.”² The professor “with his mouth shews much love; but his heart goeth after his covetousness.”³ The backslider “*hath not turned unto me with his whole heart,* but feignedly, saith the Lord.”⁴ The faithful, upright believer alone brings his heart, *his whole heart,* to the Lord—“When thou saidst—Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee—Thy face, Lord, will I seek.”⁵ For he only has found an object that attracts and fills his whole heart—and if he had a thousand hearts, would attract and fill them all. He has found his way to God by faith in Jesus. In that way he continues to *seek*. His whole heart is engaged to know and love more and more. Here alone the blessing is enjoyed, and the promise made good—“Ye shall seek me, and find me, when *ye shall search for me with all your heart.*”⁶

But let me not shrink from the question—Do I “*keep his testimonies*” from constraint or from love? Surely when I consider my own natural aversion and enmity to the law of God, and the danger of self-deception in the external service of the Lord, I have much need to pray—“*Incline my heart to thy testimonies. Give me understanding—save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*”⁷ And if they are blessed, who seek the Lord *with their whole heart,* how am I seeking him? Alas! with how much distraction; with how little

¹ Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

² Hos. x. 2.

³ Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

⁴ Jer. iii. 10.

⁵ Psalm xxvii. 8.

⁶ Jer. xxix. 13.

⁷ Verses 36, 125, 146.

heart-work! Oh! let me “seek his strength” in order to “seek his face.”¹

Lord! search—teach—incline—uphold me. Help me to plead thy gracious promise—“I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; *for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.*”²

• 3. *They also do no iniquity; they walk in his ways.*

THIS was not their character from their birth. Once they were *doing* nothing but *iniquity*. It was without mixture, without cessation—from the fountain head.³ Now it is written of them—“*they do no iniquity.*” Once they walked, even as others,⁴ in the way of their own hearts—“enemies to God by wicked works.” Now “*they walk in his ways.*” They are “new creatures in Christ; old things are passed away; behold! all things are become new.”⁵ This is their highly-privileged state—Sin shall not have dominion over them: for they are not under the law, but under grace.⁶ They are “born of God, and they cannot commit sin: for their seed remaineth in them, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God.”⁷ Their hatred and resistance of sin are therefore now as instinctive, as was their former enmity and opposition

¹ Psalm cv. 4.

² Jer. xxiv. 7.

³ “Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil—only evil—continually.” And this “God saw”—before whom “all things are naked and open”—who searcheth the heart, and therefore cannot be mistaken. Gen. vi. 5.

But lest we should conceive this to be the picture of some generation of so peculiarly aggravated a character, that the awful demonstration of his wrath could no longer be restrained, this testimony is repeated by the same Omniscient Judge, immediately subsequent to the flood, (Gen. viii. 21,) and confirmed by him in many express declarations. Jer. xvii. 9, 10. Matt. xv. 19.

⁴ Eph. ii. 2, 3. Col. i. 21.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁶ Rom. vi. 14.

⁷ 1 John iii. 9.

to God. Not indeed that the people of God are as “the saints made perfect,” who “*do no iniquity.*” This is a dream of perfection—unscriptural and self-deluding.¹ The unceasing advocacy of their Heavenly Friend evidently supposes the indwelling power of sin, to the termination of our earthly pilgrimage. The supplication also in the prayer of our Lord teaches them to ask for daily pardon and deliverance from “temptation,” as for “daily bread.”² Yes—to our shame be it spoken—we are sinners still; yet—praised be God!—not “walking after the course,” not “fulfilling the desires,” of sin. The acting of sin is now like the motion of a stone upward, violent and unnatural. If it is not cast out, it is dethroned. We are not, as before, “its willing people,” but its reluctant, struggling captives. It is not “the day of its power.”

And here lies the holy liberty of the Gospel—not, as some have feigned,—a liberty to “continue in sin, that grace may abound;”³ but a deliverance from the guilt and condemnation of *abhorred, resisted, yet still indwelling sin*. When our better will hath cast us off—when we can say in the sight of an heart-searching God, “*What we hate, that do we*”—the responsibility is not ours—“It is not we that do it, but sin that dwelleth in us.”⁴ Still let us inquire, is the promise of deliverance from sin “sweet to us?”⁵ And does our successful resistance in the spiritual conflict realize the earnest of its complete fulfilment? Blessed Jesus! what do we owe to thy cross for the present redemption from its guilt and curse, and much more for the blissful prospect of the glorified state, when

¹ Comp. Eccl. vii. 20, with Job ix. 20. Phil. iii. 12.

² Matt. vi. 11—13.

³ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

⁴ Rom. vii. 15—20.

⁵ Ib. vi. 14.

this hated guest shall be an inmate no more! ¹ O let us take the very print of thy death into our souls in the daily crucifixion of sin. ² Let us know the "power of thy resurrection" in an habitual "walk in newness of life." ³

4. *Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.*

THE Psalmist here begins to direct his address to his God, and calls to mind those obligations to obedience, in which he felt his own happiness most nearly concerned. For even under that dispensation which "gendereth unto bondage," much encouragement was connected with the "*command to keep the Lord's precepts diligently.*" "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, *that it might be well with them and with their children for ever.*" ⁴ But surely we, under a dispensation of love, can never want a motive for obedience! Let the daily mercies of Providence stir up the question—"What shall I render unto the Lord?" ⁵ Let the far richer mercies of grace produce "a living sacrifice" to be "presented to the Lord." ⁶ Let "the love of Christ constrain us." ⁷ Let the recollection of the "price with which we were bought," remind us of the Lord's property in us, and of our obligations to "glorify him in our body, and in our spirit, which are his." ⁸ Let us only "behold the Lamb of God;" let us hear his wrestling supplications, his deserted cry, his

¹ Rev. xxi. 27. ² Rom. vi. 6. • ³ Phil. iii. 10. Rom. vi. 4, 5.

⁴ Deut. v. 29. Comp. Deut. vi. 17, 18; xxviii. 1, 2. Jer. vii. 23.

⁵ Psalm cxvi. 12.

⁶ Rom. xii. 1.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁸ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

expiring agonies—the price of our redemption; and then let us ask ourselves, Can we want a motive?

But what is the scriptural view of Evangelical obedience? It is the work of the Spirit, enabling us to “obey the truth.”¹ It is the end of the purpose of God, who “hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.*”² It is the only satisfactory evidence of the sincerity of our profession.³ Then let me make the inquiry in the morning—What is the work appointed for the day? “Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.”⁴ Let me maintain an anxious and watchful spirit, that in my daily business I may be employed in the Lord’s work. Let a guard be set upon my thoughts, my lips, my temper, and pursuits, that nothing may hinder me, but rather every thing may assist me, in “*keeping the Lord’s precepts diligently.*” Let there be a trading for him with all the talents entrusted to me. What is the reason that I ever find the precepts to be “grievous” to me? Is it not that some indolence is indulged; or some “iniquity regarded in my heart;” or some principle of unfaithfulness operating to divide my service with two masters, when I should rather be conflicting with besetting hindrances, and seeking to overcome them all in “following the Lord fully?” Oh! for the spirit of “simplicity and godly sincerity” in the precepts of God. Oh! for that love, which is the main-spring of diligence, warm and constant, taking the place of every other motive in leading me on in the service of God. Oh! for a large supply

¹ 1 Pet. i. 22.

² Eph. i. 4.

³ Matt. xii. 33. John xiv. 15, 21.

⁴ Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

of that "wisdom which is from above," and which is "without partiality and without hypocrisy!"¹

5. *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*

THE Lord has indeed "*commanded us to keep his precepts.*" But, alas! where is our power? Satan would make the sense of our weakness an excuse for indolence. The Spirit of God convinces us of it, as an incitement to prayer, and an exercise of faith. If, Reader, your heart is perfect with God, you "consent to the law that it is good;" you "delight in it after the inner man;"² you would not have one jot or tittle altered, mitigated, or repealed, that it might be more conformed to your own will, or allow you more liberty and self-indulgence in the ways of sin. But do you not sigh over your short comings; when you aim indeed at the perfect standard of holiness, yet at your best moments, and in your highest attainments fall so far below it; seeing indeed the way before you, but feeling yourself without ability to walk in it? Then let a sense of your helplessness for the work of the Lord lead you to the throne of grace, to pray, and watch, and wait, for the strengthening and refreshing influences of the Spirit of grace. Here let your faith realize at one and the same view your utter insufficiency, and your complete All-sufficiency.³ Here behold Him, who is ever presenting himself before God—yea—commanding God on your behalf—receiving in himself, according to the good pleasure of the Father, as our glorious Head,⁴ the full supply for this and every successive moment of inexpressible need. Our work is not therefore left upon our own hands, or

¹ James iii. 17.

² Rom. vii. 16, 22, 23.

³ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

⁴ Col. i. 18, 19.

wrought out at our "own charges." So long as "He hath the residue of the Spirit,"¹ "grace" will be found "sufficient,"—Divine "strength made perfect in weakness."² "Without him we can do nothing,"³—"Through Him all things."⁴ Even the "worm Jacob shall thresh the mountains," when the Lord says—"Fear not, I will help thee."⁵

The connexion of this verse with the preceding, leads us to remark, how accurately the middle path is preserved, as keeping us at an equal distance from the idea of self-sufficiency to "*keep the Lord's statutes*," and self-justification in neglecting them. The first attempt to render spiritual obedience will quickly convince us of our utter helplessness. We might as soon create a world, as create in our hearts one pulse of spiritual life. And yet our inability does not cancel our obligation. It is the weakness of a heart that "cannot be subject to the law of God," only because it is "carnal, enmity against God."⁶ And therefore our inability is our sin, our guilt, our condemnation; and, instead of excusing our condition, stops our mouth, and leaves us destitute of any-plea of defence before God. Thus our obligation remains in full force. We are bound to obey the commands of God, whether we can or not. What then remains for us, but to return the mandate to heaven, accompanied with an earnest prayer, that the Lord would write upon our hearts those *statutes*, to which he requires obedience in his word?—"Thou hast com-

¹ Mal. ii. 15.² 2 Cor. xii. 9.³ John xv. 5.⁴ Phil. iv. 13.⁵ Isa. xli. 14, 15.

⁶ Rom. viii. 7. Comp. Genesis xxxvii. 4. John viii. 43; v. 40. 2 Peter ii. 14,—where the moral inability is clearly traced to the love of sin, or the obstinate unbelief of the heart, and therefore is inexcusable. The case of the heathen is also described in a strictly parallel view, and the evil traced to the same wilful source. Rom. i. 28.

manded us to keep thy statutes diligently," We acknowledge, Lord, our obligation; but we feel our impotency. Lord, help us: we look unto thee, "*O that our ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*" "Give what thou commandest; and then command what thou wilt."¹ Now, as if to exhibit the fulness and suitability of the promises of the gospel, the commands and prayers are returned back again from heaven with promises of quickening and directing grace. Here then is the Lord's end with us fully answered. He did not issue the commands, expecting that we could turn our own hearts to them; but rather that the conviction of our entire helplessness might cast us upon him, who loves to be sought, and never will be thus sought in vain. And indeed this is a part of "the mystery of godliness," that in proportion as we depend upon him, who is alike "the Lord our righteousness" and our strength, our desires after holiness will increase, and our prayers become more fervent. He who commands our duty, perfectly knows our weakness. And he who feels his own weakness is fully encouraged to depend upon the power of his Saviour. Thus faith is the principle of evangelical obedience, and the promises of his grace enable us for duty, at the very time that we are commanded to it.² In this view are brought together the supreme authority of the Lawgiver, the total insufficiency of the creature, and full provisions of the Saviour, and the all-sufficiency of "the God of all grace." We are led to pray for what we want, to be thankful for what we have, to trust for what is promised. Thus "all is of God." Christ "is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."³ Thus "grace reigns" triumphant.

¹ "Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis."—*Augustine.*

² "Quod lex imperat, fides impetrat."

³ Rev. xxii. 13.

The foundation is laid in grace, and the head-stone will be brought forth with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace unto it."—The Saviour's work is finished, and Jesus is crowned Lord of all for ever.

6. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*

THE Lord expects our obedience to be not only "*diligent*," but universal. Indeed a partial obedience will never satisfy a child of God. The exclusion of any commandment from its supreme regard in the heart is the brand of hypocrisy. Even Herod could "do many things," and yet one evil way cherished, and therefore unforsaken, was sufficient to show that the sovereign power of sin was undisturbed within.² Saul slew all the Amalekites *but one*; and that single exception in the path of universal obedience, marked the unsoundness of his profession, cost him the loss of his throne, and brought him under the awful displeasure of his God.³ And thus the foot or the hand, or the right eye, the corrupt unmortified member, brings the whole body to hell.⁴ Reserves are the canker upon Christian sincerity. A secret indulgence—the rolling of the sweet morsel under the tongue—"the part of the price kept back"⁵—stamps our service as a robbery, not as an offering. We may be free, sincere, and earnest in many parts of our prescribed duty; but this "root of bitterness" renders the whole an abomination.

If, then, I am a genuine believer, sincerity will be the stamp of my profession. Though ever ready to acknowledge my inability to render perfect obedience

¹ Zech. iv. 7.

² Mark vi. 18—20.

³ 1 Sam. xv. 12—23.

⁴ Mark ix. 43—48.

⁵ Acts v. 1, 2.

to the least of the commandments, yet my desire and purpose will include the whole compass of uninterrupted obedience. I shall no more venture to break the least than the greatest of the commandments; much less shall I ever think of attempting to atone for the breach of one by the performance of the rest. They are indeed many commandments, yet they form but one law; and I know who has said—"Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend, in one point, he is guilty of all,"¹ However the professor may confine his regard to the second table, (as if the first were ceremonial, or obsolete, or the regulation of the outward man was the utmost extent of the requirement), I would fix my eye with equal regard to both; yet marking with especial determination any command in either of them, that may appear most directly opposed to the besetting corruptions of my heart. Thus "walking in the fear of the Lord," I may hope to walk "in the comfort of the Holy Ghost;"² and "hereby shall I know that I am of the truth, and shall assure my heart before God."³

But where, in my strictest and most persevering walk, would be my hope of acceptance, if my eye be not steadily fixed upon Him, whose obedience has "fulfilled all righteousness"⁴ in my stead, and whose death "has redeemed me from the curse"⁵ of my unrighteousness, when repentance, prayers, and tears, would have been of no avail? Yet, in what path, we might ask, but the way of holiness, can we expect to realize the enjoyment of union and communion with our Lord? "He that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in him."⁶ We cannot therefore but suspect that assurance of the present favour of God, which is

¹ James ii. 10, 11.

² Acts ix. 31.

³ 1 John iii. 19.

⁴ Matt. iii. 15.

⁵ Gal. iii. 13.

⁶ 1 John iii. 24.

not weakened by self-indulgence, unwatchfulness, allowance of secret sins, or neglect of secret duties.—“If thou return to the Almighty,” said a wise man, “thou shalt be built up, *thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. Then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.*”¹

Is it not then important for us to look into the ground and character of our assurance? Does it rest simply and exclusively upon the testimony of the Gospel? Will it abide the test of the word of God? Is it productive of tenderness of conscience, watchfulness and circumspection of conduct? Does it exercise our souls in adding grace to grace, that we may “make our calling and election sure,” and “an entrance may be ministered to us *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?”² The believer’s plea for assurance is found in adherence to the path of obedience—“*I have stuck unto thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.*”³

7. *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.*

THE law of God is justly called his “judgments,” his “*righteous judgments,*” as marking his view and estimate of our character, and his rule of procedure with us in the court of heaven. David had indeed “*learned*” much of these “*righteous judgments,*” but so much yet remained unlearned and unknown, that his attainments seemed to be as nothing—“*Thy*

¹ Job xxii. 23, 26.

² 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

³ Verses 31, 80.

commandment”—he exclaims—“*is exceeding broad.*”¹ When the Apostle, after twenty years’ acquaintance with the gospel, expressed it as the one desire of his heart—“That I may know Christ”²—it is evident that he entertained the same humbling views of his progress in divine knowledge, and the same exalted apprehensions of the value of treasures yet unexplored, and which, as he advanced towards higher attainments, were progressively opening before him. Conceit of knowledge is the greatest enemy to knowledge, and the strongest proof of ignorance; so that “if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.”—“He deceiveth himself.”³ But what is the motive that enlivens the believer in the pursuit of more extended spiritual knowledge? Is it that he may live upon the airy breath of human applause? No, rather that he may “*praise his God with uprightness of heart.*” We always find, that as our mind is dark, our tongue is dumb, our lips are sealed, and we are unable to bear a testimony for our God. But when “he opens our understandings” to “*learn his judgments,*” he will next “open our lips, and our mouths shall shew forth his praise.”⁴ As his “*judgments*” may be considered to include the whole revelation of his word, they display the view of “the glory of God” unveiled “in the face of Jesus Christ,”⁵ which will ever tune that heart with the melody of heaven—And this indeed is the end for which “his people are formed;”⁶ for which they “are called out of darkness into marvellous light.”⁷ This is the daily frame in which our God will be glorified.⁸

¹ Ver. 96.

² Phil. iii. 10—14.

³ 1 Cor. viii. 2. Gal. vi. 3.

⁴ Ps. li. 15; also verses 27, 171.

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

⁶ Isa. xliii. 21.

⁷ 1 Peter ii. 9.

⁸ Psalm l. 23. For an example of the uprightness of heart in the service of praise here alluded to, see 1 Chron. xxix. 13—18.

But in order to "*praise with uprightness of heart,*" we need great watchfulness, that it may really be "out of the abundance" of what our hearts have "*learned*" of his "*righteous judgments.*" For it is possible even for the real believer to speak of his Saviour with a secret lurking after self-exaltation. It is possible really to be seeking and serving ourselves in the very act of seeming to serve and honour him. Surely the very thought of the selfishness that defiles our holiest services of praise on earth, may well quicken our longings after that world of praise, where the flame burns active, bright, incessant; where we shall offer our sacrifices without defilement, without intermission, without weariness, without end.

8. *I will keep thy statutes : O forsake me not utterly.*

THE resolution to "*keep the Lord's statutes*" is the natural result of having "*learned his righteous judgments.*" And on this point David illustrates the inseparable and happy union of "*simplicity*" of dependence, and "*godly sincerity*" of obedience; fixed in his purpose, but not—like Peter—self-confident, instantly upon forming his resolution, he recollects that the performance of it is beyond the power of human strength; and therefore the next moment, and almost the same moment, he follows it up with prayer—"I will keep thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly." What daily reason have we to beware of self-confidence, even in the course of sincerity in the ways of God! As we lean upon an arm of flesh, or upon an Almighty Saviour, we shall stumble or advance in our spiritual course. Temporary desertion may be the seasonable chastisement of spiritual wantonness. Sometimes grace has been given

in answer to prayer; but, when given, it was not duly prized, or diligently improved. "The Beloved"—in answer to solicitation—"is come into his garden;" he knocks at the door, but the spouse is "asleep." The answer to prayer was not expected, not waited for, and therefore not enjoyed; and the sleeper awakes too late, and finds herself forsaken by the object of her desire.¹ Again—when we have given place to temptation;² when "our mountain stands strong;"³ when love for our Saviour "waxes cold," and our earnestness in seeking him is fainting;⁴ we must not be surprised if we are left for a time to the trial of a deserted state.

Yet we sometimes speak of the hidings of God's countenance, as if it were a sovereign act, calling for implicit submission; when the cause should at least be sought for, and will generally be found, in some unlawful indulgence, or act of unwatchfulness, or self-dependence. "Are the consolations of God small with thee? "Is there any secret thing with thee?"⁵ It was while David "kept silence" from the language of contrition, that he felt the pressure of the heavy hand of his frowning God:⁶ and perhaps the darkness which has sometimes clouded our paths, may be the voice of God speaking loudly to us—"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing, and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God."⁷

But, in the engagement of the Lord's everlasting covenant, how clear is the warrant of faith!—how ample the encouragement for prayer—"Forsake me

¹ Cant. iv. 16, with v. 1—6.

² 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

³ Psalm xxx. 6, 7.

⁴ Cant. iii. 1—4.

⁵ Job xv. 11.

⁶ Psalm xxxii. 3, 4.

⁷ Jer. ii. 19.

not utterly!" David knew and wrote of the Lord's unchangeable faithfulness to his people; and, while he dreaded even a temporary separation from his God more than any worldly affliction, he could plead that gracious declaration — "Nevertheless, my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail."¹ We would not indeed make the promises of grace an encouragement to carelessness: yet it is indispensable to our spiritual establishment, that we receive them in their full, free, and sovereign declaration. How many fainting souls have been refreshed by the assurance—"For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee—with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer!" "My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."² In dreading the withdrawal of the Lord's presence, a lowly, self-abased and dependent spirit will be at once our comfort and security. In this frame we shall best learn to "make our boast in the Lord," "confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."³ And even, if awhile destitute of sensible consolation, still our language will be—"I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob; and I will look for him."⁴

Great indeed is the danger and evil, to the soul—if we apprehend the Lord to have forsaken us, because we are in darkness; or that we are out of the way, because we are in perplexity. These are the very hand-posts, that shew us that we are in the way of his own promised leading—painful exercise—faithful

¹ Psalm lxxxix. 33.

² Isa. liv. 7, 8. John x. 28.

³ Psalm xxxiv. 2. Phil. i. 6.

⁴ Isa. viii. 17.

keeping—eternal salvation;—“I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, *and not forsake them.*”¹ Oh! the rest—the satisfaction of being permitted to place a blind implicit confidence in a covenant-keeping God!

But is any afraid that he will, after all that he has engaged, “*forsake him utterly?*” Let me ask you, What evidence do you find of such desertion on your soul? Do you find your heart willing to forsake him? Are there no mournings and thirstings after the return of the Lord? He has indeed warned you that, “if you forsake him he will forsake you.”² But can you forsake him? ‘Let him do as seemeth him good (is the language of your heart); I will wait for him, follow after him, cleave to his word, cling to his cross: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”’³ Though my comfort is clouded, my hope remains unchanging, unchangable—such as I would not resign for the glory of an earthly crown.’ How plain is the seal of heavenly influence in these earnest breathings after the Saviour! this abiding confidence in his love! Can the Lord “forsake the work of his own hands?”⁴ Sooner should heaven and earth pass, than the faithful engagements of the gospel be thus broken.⁵

¹ Isa. xlii. 16.

² 2 Chron. xv. 2.

³ Job xiii. 15.

⁴ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.

⁵ Augustine’s paraphrase of this verse is beautifully descriptive of the believer’s conflict in a state of temporary desertion. “O Lord, if—lest I should be proud, and should say in my prosperity, I shall never be removed—it pleased thee to tempt me, yet forsake me not overlong;” that is, if thou hast thus forsaken me, that I may know how weak I am without thy help, yet “*forsake me not utterly,*” lest I perish. I know that of thy good will thou hast given me strength; and if thou turnest away thy face from me, I shall forthwith be troubled. “O forsake me not, that I perish not.”

PART II.

9. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

SURELY it must be considered as a most affecting proof of the natural alienation of the heart from God, that the youth of man—the bloom and freshness of his mind—his “first love”—should naturally be devoted to the service of sin. Ever since fallen man “begat a son in his own likeness,” it has been true that “the imagination of man’s heart has been evil from his youth.”¹ For “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?”² And never is the cry, “My Father! thou art the guide of my youth”³—uttered from the heart until the misery of wandering without a guide has been painfully felt. And even when the youthful heart begins to feel the touch of divine grace, and the desire to return homewards is first excited; the habit of wandering from God, and the long-cherished pollutions of sin, seem to form an almost invincible barrier to progress. The inquiry then must be one, of the deepest concern—“*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*” And the answer is ready at hand. Let him “*take heed thereto according to the word*” of God. It was thus that Joseph in Egypt,⁴ and Daniel with his young companions in Babylon,⁵ were enabled to “*cleanse their way*” in the midst of the defiling atmosphere around them. It was probably the recollection of this purifying efficacy of

¹ Gen. v. 3; viii. 21.

² Job xiv. 4.

³ Jer. iii. 4.

⁴ Gen. xxxix. 9.

⁵ Dan. i. 8—20; iii. 12—18.

the word, that induced the venerable Beza to mention in his will, among his chief matters of thankfulness to God, the mercy of having been called to the knowledge of the truth at the age of sixteen years, by which means, during a course of more than seventy years' walk with God, he "escaped the pollutions of the world through lust." But let us not forget, that the "*way can be cleansed*" by no other process than by the cleansing of the heart; for how can a corrupt fountain "send forth" other than "bitter waters?"¹ The important recollection, that "out of the heart are the issues of life," will give birth to the earnest supplications—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."²

How precious, therefore, is *the word of God*, as opening to us the means of this cleansing operation! When our Saviour had been setting forth himself as "the way, the truth, and the life," and exhibiting the high privilege of union with himself—"Now"—he adds—"ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."³ This is "the truth," which he pleaded with his Father as the means of our sanctification.⁴ This is the hope, by which "every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."⁵ Here are the promises, by which we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."⁶ But oh! how does the recollection force itself upon us,—

¹ James iii. 11, 12.

² Prov. iy. 23. Psalm li. 10.

³ John xiv. ; xv. 1—3.

⁴ Ib. xvii. 17.

⁵ 1 John iii. 3.

⁶ 2 Cor. vii. 1. Comp. 2 Pet. i. 4. For a striking illustration of this subject, the reader may refer to the account of Augustine's conversion, as recorded by himself. Confessions, Books viii. ix. The substance of it may be found in Milner's Church History, vol. ii. 353—356; and a most instructive use is made of it, as throwing light upon the doctrine of conversion, by Dr. Owen, in his valuable work on the Spirit, Book iii. chap. vi.

can we lose sight of the recollection, that our *way* wants daily *cleansing*!—so defiled are our actions, our thoughts, our motives,—nay more, our prayers and services. Let us then “*take heed according to the word of God*”—specially thankful for its heavenly light, that guides us to the “*fountain that is opened for sin and for uncleanness.*”¹ Let us also under the same Divine light seek for the daily sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God. “*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*”² ‘*Cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit.*’³

10. *With my whole heart have I sought thee; O let me not wander from thy commandments.*

WE lose much of the comfort of our religion, and greatly obscure the glory of our profession, by neglecting to bring “*our whole heart*” to the work of the Lord. When sin is vigorous, and our spiritual affections are dull, and various circumstances combine to put difficulties in the way of prayer; this is a crisis with the soul, when strong faith is needed to overcome and to persevere. But then it is that the soul too commonly yields to the difficulty, and contents itself either with heartless complainings, or with just sufficient exertion to quiet the voice of conscience, and produce a delusive peace within. But remember that the Lord will not be found thus. His promise is not to such seekers as these; and if we are satisfied with such a state as this, we must look for a very scanty measure of spiritual success, accompanied with the total absence of spiritual enjoyment. This however was not David’s spirit. In the true spirit of

¹ Zech. xiii. 1.

² Psalm, xix. 12.

³ Prayer-Book.

Christian confidence he could appeal—" *With my whole heart have I sought thee.*" And this assurance, so far from producing self-confidence, will, so far as it is genuine, be invariably attended with peculiar apprehensions of our own weakness, such as give constant occasion for the prayer—" *O let me not wander from thy commandments.*" Yet the feeblest desire and attempt to seek the Lord, is the Spirit's rising beam in the heart, a "day of small things" not to be "despised."¹ It is distinguished from every other principle by the simplicity of its object—"This one thing I do." "One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I seek after."² My God! my Saviour! "*with my whole heart have I sought thee.* The desire of my soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."³ And it is when the soul is thus conscious of "following the Lord fully," that there is a peculiar *dread of wandering*. In a careless or half-hearted state, wanderings are not watched, so long as they do not lead to any open deviation from the way. Secret prayer will be hurried over, worldly thoughts unresisted, waste of time in frivolous pursuits indulged, without much concern. But it is not so when the heart is *fully* in pursuit of its object. There is a carefulness, lest wandering thoughts should become habitual. There is a resistance of the first step that might lead into a devious path. The soul remembers the "wormwood and the gall,"⁴ "the roaring lion," and the devouring wolf; and in the recollection of the misery of its former wandering, dreads any departure from the Shepherd's fold. This is indeed a blessed

¹ Zech. iv. 10.

² Phil. iii. 13. Psalm xxvii. 4.

³ Isa. xxvi. 8, 9.

⁴ Lam. iii. 19.

state of mind, and one which the flock of Christ should cherish with godly jealousy. Yet let it be remembered, that daily progress in the heavenly walk is not maintained by the yesterday's supply of grace. It must flow from a fresh supply continually drawn in by humble and dependent prayer, such as—" *O let me not wander from thy commandments.*" 'Lord, I feel my heart so prone to wander. My affections are often scattered to the ends of the earth. "Uplift my heart to fear thy name."¹ Concentrate every thought, every desire, in thyself, as the one object of attraction.'

11. *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

WHAT an aggregate of guilt and misery is comprehended in this short word "sin"—the greatest curse that ever entered the universe of God, and the parent of every other curse! Its guilt is aggravated beyond the conception of thought. Injury to a Superior—a Father—a Sovereign! It seems impossible to rise in our conception, so as to give an adequate idea of its infinite malignity. Its power is misery, wherever it extends—in the heart—in the family—in the world. In eternity its power is unrestrained. Sometimes the death-bed scene casts a fearful gleam of light upon "the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never shall be quenched:"² but what besides experience can develop its full-grown horrors? How supremely important therefore to secure the object of our preservation from sin! and how wisely adapted are the means to the end! that *word*—which the man of God had just before

¹ Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

² Mark ix. 44.

mentioned as the guide to the *cleansing of his way*,¹—he *hides within his heart*—that it may be ready at hand for every moment of watchful conflict and resistance of sin. It is not therefore the mere acquaintance with *the word*, that will prove an effectual safeguard from sin. There are many cases, indeed, where “Satan” shuts out its entrance, or “catcheth away that which was sown.” But even when it finds a passage, its impression is too often transient, and utterly uninfluential for permanent benefit. In many cases also is it “choked by the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things; and it becometh unfruitful.” But whenever it falls on good ground, “the honest and good heart” “*hides it*, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with patience, unto perfection.”² Here it “dwells richly in all wisdom,” as a treasury to be resorted to, when need and occasion require; as a principle of holiness, a covering from sin. In this view it is recommended by one who had well studied its uses, and acquainted himself with its value—“My son, let them not” (the Divine precepts) “depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion. So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.”³ David also gives us the same experience of the power of this safeguard—“By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.”⁴ And it was probably the recollection of many instances of preservation, united with a sense of continual danger, that suggested the prayer—“Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.”⁵

¹ Verse 9.

² Luke viii. 15, with the whole parable.

³ Prov. iii. 21—24. Compare Prov. ii. 10—15.

⁴ Psalm xvii. 4.

⁵ Verse 133.

This *hiding of the word in the heart* is a blessed means of walking with God in the hurry, business, and temptation of the day. The Saviour's love, as manifested in *the word*—what power does it realize to beat off the incursion of the tempter! What a restraint from wandering thoughts—what a keeping of the heart in communion with God—is the presentment from *the word* of some motive to Christian simplicity—some matter to ejaculatory prayer! So also in a moment of more direct temptation—whether from the insinuating bait of pleasure, or some entangling hindrance of obligation—how seasonable is the warning of *the word hid* in the heart—"No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God!"¹ So in the more spiritual conflict, let this *word*—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out"—be *hid in the heart*—what a preservative is it against unbelief!² Again—supposing the unbelieving believer (if the expression may be allowed) is alarmed by ridicule or persecution, what saith his Saviour's *word*? "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."³ He fears that he shall never hold out unto the end; but the *word* assures him from his God—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."⁴ He trembles lest his sins should rise up to his condemnation; but *the word* again speaks—"The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin."⁵ And then as to duties. Let his Saviour's *word* rebuke his indolence and unwatchfulness,— "What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."⁶ Let the sorrowful story of his agony in the garden, and

¹ Luke ix. 62.² John vi. 37.³ Ib. xv. 18.⁴ Heb. xiii. 5.⁵ 1 John i. 7.⁶ Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.

his death on the cross, be treasured up in the heart, that "sin may appear yet more exceedingly sinful."—But how is *the word* to gain entrance into hearts like ours? How shall it be "*hid*" in so unkindly a soil? No power of man surely could plant it there. The Holy Spirit's almighty agency must be diligently sought; for in proportion as we are filled with his gracious influences shall we be armed, as was our Master, for the effectual resistance of our spiritual temptations.¹

Lastly, connected with this subject, mark *the Christian's Character*—"In whose heart is my law."²—*His Security*—"None of his steps shall slide."³—*His Happiness*—"O how I love thy law!"⁴—*His Victory*—"The word of God abideth in him, and he hath overcome the wicked one."⁵—All infallibly provided by the covenant promise—"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts."⁶ O let us not then be afraid of a close contact with the word, though the cost may be the cutting off a right hand for the saving of the life. No better test can be needed of the security of our state with God, than a willingness to come to the searching light of his holy word.⁷

12. *Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.*

"Praise is comely for the upright."⁸ It is at once their duty and their privilege. But in its highest exercise what does it amount to, when placed on the ground of its own merit? We clothe our ideas with magnificence of language, and deck them out with all

¹ Compare Luke iv. 1, 2.

³ Psalm xxxvii. 31.

⁵ 1 John ii. 14, with Eph. vi. 17.

⁷ Compare John iii. 20, 21.

² Isaiah li. 7.

⁴ Verse 97.

⁶ Jer. xxxi. 33.

⁸ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

the richness of imagery: and perhaps we may be pleased with our forms of praise; but what are they in his sight beyond the offering of a contemptible worm, spreading before its Maker its own mean and low notions of Divine Majesty? If a worm were to raise its head, and cry—‘O sun, thou art the source of light and heat to a widely-extended universe’—it would, in fact, render a higher praise to the sun than we can ever give to our Maker. Between it and us there is some proportion—between us and God none. Yet, unworthy as the offering confessedly is, it is such as he will not despise. Nay, more,—instead of spurning it from his presence, he has revealed himself as “inhabiting the praises of Israel,”¹—intimating to us, that the service of praise is “set forth in his sight as incense,” and at the same time, that it should not be as an occasional visit of a guest, but the daily unceasing exercise of one at his own home. The act of praise, however, in its real character, depends entirely upon the state of the heart. In the contemplative philosopher it excites nothing but barren admiration: in the believer it becomes a principle of practical comfort and encouragement. With him the character of God is always an incitement to praise, and the attempt to praise gives strength and confidence to prayer. For in taking up the song of praise, can we forget who the Christian’s God is; and what is the revelation which he has been pleased to give of himself in the gospel of his dear Son; how it divests every attribute of its terrors, and shines before us in all the glory of his faithfulness and love? The ascription of praise—“*Blessed art thou, O Lord*”—leads us therefore to take up the prophet’s song of triumph—“Who is a God like unto

¹ Psalm xxii. 3.

thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retained not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”¹ Truly then he is “*blessed*” in himself, and delights to communicate his blessedness to his people. Therefore we are emboldened to ask for continual “*teaching in his statutes*”²—in the truths which he has revealed, and the precepts which he has enjoined; that we may “walk” with him “in love,” and “be followers of him, as dear children.”³ The practical influence, however, of Divine light upon the heart constitutes its peculiar privilege. Man’s teaching puffeth up—God’s teaching humbleth. Man’s teaching may make us more learned—God’s teaching makes us more holy. It persuades while it enlightens. It draws the heart, inclines the will, and carries out the soul to Christ.⁴ The tried character and faithfulness of God affords a sure warrant for this petition—“*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way.*”⁵ This warrant is especially confirmed in approaching him as our covenant God—“Lead me in thy truth, and *teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation. Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God.*”⁶

Reader, do you desire the Lord’s teaching? Surrounded as you are with the means of instruction, what progress are you making in the Lord’s statutes? Is your knowledge increased since the last year? Have you a deeper acquaintance with the character of God—with his holiness and love, with your own defilements, inconstancy, and weakness before him?

¹ Micah vii. 18.

² Compare verses 64, 68, where the same acknowledgment and the same plea are again made.

³ Ephesians v. 1, 2.

⁴ John vi. 44, 45.

⁵ Psalm xxv. 8.

⁶ Psalm xxv. 5; cxliiii. 10.

Do you often frequent that “new and living way,”¹ by which at all times you may find a free access to his throne? that only way, by which the acknowledgment of praise can ever ascend with acceptance before him? “By him (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks unto his name.”²

13. *With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.*

How high—how honourable the privilege of becoming a witness for our Saviour!—This may well give a spring to the prayer—*Teach me thy statutes*—that my heart being under the Lord’s grace, *with my lips I may declare all the judgments of his mouth.* This is trading with our talents, when all our opportunities of service are improved for him. And such trading will bring a certain increase; for “to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.”³ But—“our lips are our own,”⁴—is the proud language of the world. Blessed be God; “we know that we are not our own.”⁵—Most gladly do we acknowledge, that the Lord, who fashioned our lips, has the best claim to our service. And when he added to the claim of creation the right of purchase,⁶ how ought this double claim to be a security for the employment of all that we are, and all that we have, to his glory!

David’s readiness to “*declare the judgments of God’s mouth*” was evidently the overflowing of a heart filled with heavenly love. Is our intercourse with each other under the influence of this unction

¹ Heb. x. 20.

² Ib. xiii. 15.

³ Matt. xxv. 29.

⁴ Psalm xii. 4.

⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

⁶ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

that cometh from above, and guided by a single desire to glorify our Saviour, to edify his people, and to quicken our own souls? The guilt of sinful silence is indeed much to be deprecated; and those, who thus prove their unfaithfulness to God, may well tremble at his awful denunciations. And yet it is possible to be bold in speech for God, when in the closet, the family, or the world, our consciences justly convict us of insincerity.—“Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?”¹ While therefore “*with our lips we declare the judgments of God’s mouth,*” let us seek to have our hearts “filled with the Spirit;”² else we shall be found talking about religion, without life in ourselves, or any prospect of benefiting others; and such a “talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.”³

This subject illustrates the *Character* of the Lord’s people—“The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment;”⁴ *their Resolution*—“My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof;”⁵ *their Prayer*—“O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise;”⁶ *their blessing*—“The lips of the righteous feed many. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.”⁷ The example of the Saviour here, as in every other exercise of our duty, is our perfect and encouraging pattern, “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest.”⁸ In this spirit of their Master, the Apostles were enabled to awe their persecutors

¹ Romans ii. 21.

³ Prov. xiv. 23, with *v.* 19.

⁵ Psalm lxxi. 15.

⁷ Prov. x. 21; xv. 4.

⁸ Psalm xl. 9, 10, with Luke iv. 16—22.

² Eph. v. 18, 19.

⁴ Psalm xxxvii. 30.

⁶ Ib. li. 15.

into forbearance—"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."¹

How sinful is it to employ our lips for any but the Lord! Yet scarcely less sinful is our reluctance to employ them for him! Surely the day, when perhaps we have been fluent in worldly conversation, and yet have neglected our opportunities for speaking a word for him, must be considered a lost day! Is there not much cause for watchfulness, prayer, and self-denial: lest by our silence we should be ashamed of him, whom by every obligation we are bound to confess? If our inability to bear a testimony for our Lord is not painful to us,² we have the greatest reason to suspect, if not the sincerity, at least the strength, of our attachment to his precious name; and we can do no better than retire into our closets with the prayer of contrition—"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord."³

14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.*

IF we desire to bear a testimony for God—in "*declaring the judgments of his mouth*"—we must realize their supreme joy far above earthly treasures, that "of the abundance of the heart our mouth may speak." There is indeed a real joy in despising earthly joys. 'How sweet,' said Augustine, referring to the period of his conversion, 'was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to lose which had been my dread; to part with which was now my joy!'⁴

¹ Acts iv. 20.

² Comp. Psalm xxxv. 1, 2. Jer. xx. 9.

³ Psalm cxliii. 2.

⁴ 'Quas amittere metus erat, jam dimittere gaudium fuit.'—Aug. Confess. Book ix. Never man in his unregenerate state, by his own confession, more strongly illustrated the truth of our Lord's declara-

More satisfying is the believer's rejoicing in the way of God, than that of the miser in his untold treasures. Here he may safely say to his soul—"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease." And these are the only riches within the reach of all. If we are poor in this world, it is the Lord's providence, If we are poor in grace, it is our own faults. It is because we have despised our Lord's counsel to buy of him, "gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich."¹ The believer's portion includes "things present and things to come;"² something enjoyed, and much more expected; the mercies of eternity added to the blessings of time; the riches of both worlds—all assured to him by the covenant of grace "*in the way of the Lord's testimonies.*" And is it not then most strange, that with such treasure in possession and in prospect, the child of God should be so unmindful of it, so careless in increasing his store, and in confirming his own interest in it? But the *riches of God's testimonies* have this peculiar property, that they cease to rejoice the heart, when they are not uppermost there. Alas! do we not know something of this? Have there not been times when they have appeared little desirable in our eyes, and we have actually rejoiced in the accession of some worldly good, or the accomplishment of some worldly desire, more than in this heavenly treasure?

tion: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John viii. 34, with 2 Pet. ii. 19.) He describes himself actually as "wallowing in the mire," with as much delight as if he were rolling himself in a bed of spices, or perfuming himself with the most precious ointment. ('*Volutare in cæno, tanquam cinnamoniis et unguentis pretiosis.*') Yet when the word pierced his heart, and brought a new bias and taste into his soul, how delightfully was his language changed in the recollection of his past "excess of riot!" '*Quam suave est istis suavitatibus carere!*'

¹ Rev. iii. 18.

² 1 Cor. iii. 22.

And then, though the believer "*rejoices in*" the whole of God's "*testimonies*," and would not for all that this world can afford lose a verse or a letter of his Bible, yet there are some parts which he delights in as his peculiar treasure. A general interest in scripture does not satisfy him. Texts, that have been directly applied to his conscience by the power of the Spirit, whether doctrinal, practical, or experimental, are especially precious; and he will be seeking to increase his little stock, until he has apprehended the full enjoyment of the whole; if indeed the fulness of that which is called "unsearchable"¹ can ever be, in this life at least, completely enjoyed. But it was not so much in the Lord's testimonies, as "*in the way of them*," that David rejoiced—the way to God, of which they testify²—"the high way of holiness,"³ in which they lead—the narrow way of the cross—so contrary to our natural desires and inclinations, that none but the true sheep of Christ can ever enter, or continue in it. In these *ways of the Lord's testimonies* he would have us *rejoice*. And who that walks in them fails to find them to be the "paths of pleasantness and peace?" "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."⁴

15. *I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.*

How much our "*rejoicing in the testimonies*" of God would be increased, by a more habitual *meditation in them!* The carnal man, however, has no heart, no ability for this spiritual exercise; and even the

¹ Ephesians iii. 8.

³ Isaiah xxxv. 8.

² John xiv. 6, with v. 39.

⁴ Jer. vi. 16.

man of God, through remaining weakness, and depravity, is often reluctant to it. Many sincere Christians are content with an indolent reading the word and prayer; and with scarcely a struggle or a trial, yield themselves up to the persuasion, that they are unable sufficiently to abstract their minds for this blessed employment. But let the trial prove the work. Perseverance in exercise will accomplish the victory over mental instability, and the spiritual difficulty will give way to prayer—"Lord, help me." The fruitfulness of this employment will soon be manifest. Does it not give active strength for the work of God, in "stirring up the gift of God that is in us,"¹ and keeping the energies of the heart in a wakeful posture of conflict and resistance? Besides this, meditation is the digestive faculty of the soul, which converts the word into real and proper nourishment; so that we shall often find more food in this revolving of a single verse in our minds, than in the mere reading of whole chapters. Thus also shall we realize the full enjoyment of its divine blessing and support—"Thy words were found, and *I did eat them*: and thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart."²

But this duty of meditation will not only include the stated times that we may be able to appropriate to the work, but the train of holy thoughts that passes through the mind during the busy hours of the day. Thus we shall maintain an habitual flow of spiritual desires and the flame of love will be excited within, till at length we are enabled to make the

¹ 2 Timothy i. 6.

² Jer. xv. 16. To this text answers the definition of meditation given by Bishop Horne in this verse, as 'that exercise of mind, whereby it recalls a known truth, as some kinds of creatures do their food, to be masticated upon, until the nutritious parts are extracted, and fitted for the purposes of life.'

Psalmist's resolution more determinately our own—
 “*I will meditate on thy precepts.*”

Never surely can we want a subject for meditation, if indeed the salvation of Jesus has been made known to our souls. How many, while musing upon this glorious theme, have felt “the fire burn”¹ within, as if their hearts were touched with a live coal from the altar of their God! Let us therefore chide our dull and sluggish spirits, that suffer the precious manna to lie ungathered upon the ground, that are slow to entertain these heavenly thoughts, or rather that heavenly guest, whose peculiar office it is to “help our infirmities,”² and especially to “take of Christ's and show it unto us.”³

The exercise, however, of this, as of every other duty, may prove a matter of form, or a habit that imparts neither pleasure nor profit.⁴ Let each of us then ask—What distinct experimental benefit have I received from the word? Do I endeavour to read it with prayerful meditation, until I find my heart filled with it?⁵

The practical influence of thus communing with the word is, that it becomes the rule of our daily conduct. By *meditating in the precepts of God*, we learn to *have respect unto his ways*. “*Thy loving-kindness,*” says the Psalmist in another place, “*is before mine eyes; and I have walked in thy truth.*”⁶ The experience of Job speaks to the same point—“My foot hath held his

¹ Psalm xxxix. 3, and compare Psalm xlv. 1.

² Romans viii. 26.

³ John xvi. 14, 15.

⁴ “If a chapter be read with the eye merely, while the mind remains inattentive, and the book be shut as soon as the chapter is finished, and thus, what has been read immediately escape the memory, what is there to surprise, if, after the whole Bible has been several times read through, we discover in ourselves no increase of piety and devotion?”—Professor Franck.

⁵ Psalm xxvi. 3.

steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; “*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*”¹

16. *I will delight myself² in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word.*

“**MEDITATION**” and habitual “*respect to the Lord’s statutes*” will never fail to issue in “*delight:*” and in the enjoyment of this delight the Christian (however small his attainments may be) would rather live and die, than in the pursuit, and even in the possession, of the most satisfying pleasures of a vain and empty world. But if it be a real “*delight in the Lord’s statutes,*” it will be universal—when they probe the secret lurking-places within, and draw out to the full light the hidden indulgences of a heart that is yet carnal;³ when they call for the entire crucifixion of every corrupt inclination, and the unreserved surrender of all to the self-denying service of our God. This spirit is very different from the *delight* of the hypocrite, which is rather to “*know,*” than to do the “*ways of his God;*”⁴ and therefore which is satisfied with outward conformity, with little or no desire to understand the “*errors*” of his heart, that he might be “*cleansed from secret faults.*”⁵ The spring of an obedience will therefore prove its sincerity; and the reality of our love will be manifested by its fruitfulness and active cheerfulness in our appointed sphere of duty.

¹ Job xxiii. 11, 12.

² “*I will solace and recreate myself.*”—Ainsworth. A beautiful illustration of the refinement of the word, when the mind is tired out with the toilsome encumbering cares of the world.

³ See Romans vii. 14. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 3.

⁴ Isaiah lviii. 2.

⁵ Psalm xix. 12.

We may also observe here an evidence of adoption. The servant may *perform* the statutes of God, but it is only the Son who “*delights in them.*” But what—we may ask—is the spring of adoption? It is “the Spirit of the Son sent into our hearts whereby we cry ‘Abba, Father.’”¹ It is because we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ; because the Scriptures are the message of reconciliation through him, that they become delightful to those who are partakers of this great salvation. The Spirit of adoption, therefore, as the principle of delight, is the spring of acceptable obedience in the Lord’s service.

And surely those who are serving him in this happy filial walk are not likely to “*forget his word.*” As the eye is continually turned to the object of its affection, so the eye of the soul, that has been fixed with *delight* in the ways of God, will be habitually resting upon them. As one of the wise heathens observed—‘I never yet heard of a covetous old man, who had forgotten where he had buried his treasure.’² The reason is abundantly evident. His heart is in it. And thus, if our hearts “have tasted that the Lord is gracious”—if we have found a treasure in the way of his testimonies—we cannot forget the sweetness of the experience, or where to go to refresh ourselves with the repetition of it.

Forgetfulness of the word is however to the Christian a source of continual complaint, and sometimes also of most distressing temptation. Not that there is always a real charge of guilt upon the conscience. For, as Boston somewhat quaintly observes—“Grace makes a good heart-memory, even where there is no

¹ Gal. iv. 6.

² ‘Nec vero quinquam senum audivi oblitum, quo loco thesaurum obruisset.’—Cicero de Senectute. c.

good head-memory.' But means must be used, and helps may be suggested. Watchfulness against the influence of the world is of the first importance. How much of the good seed is choked by the springing thorns! ¹ If our hearts are ever refreshed with spiritual delight, we should be as cautious of an uncalled-for advance into the world, as of exposing an invalid's susceptible frame to a damp or unhealthy atmosphere. Whatever warmth had been kindled in spiritual duties, may be chilled by one moment's unwary rush into an unkindly clime. We must also recommend increasing attention to the word, as the means of its preservation ²—the exercise of "faith," without which it will "not profit" ³—the active habit of love, bringing with it a more habitual interest in the statutes ⁴—all accompanied with unceasing prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, made the express subject of promise for this purpose. ⁵ Under this heavenly teaching and recollections, what *delight* will be found *in the statutes!* what blessed remembrance of his word! "O Lord God, *keep this for ever* in the imagination of the thoughts of the hearts of thy people and prepare their hearts unto thee." ⁶

¹ Matt. xiii. 22.

² Hebrews ii. 1.

³ Hebrews iv. ¹/₂.

⁴ Verse 15.

⁵ John xiv. 26.

⁶ 1 Chron. xxix. 18.

PART III.

17. *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live,
and keep thy word.*

THIS prayer appears to have been much upon David's heart, and in the substance and object of it is again repeated.¹ Nor does he fail to acknowledge the answer to it.² The believer, like David, is a man of large expectations. As regards himself—his own daily provocations and backslidings—he cannot stand upon his own ground. But when he brings with him the name—the blood—the intercession of Jesus, as soon could God deny his own beloved Son as resist the supplication of those who present this all-prevailing plea.³ Nay—is not this his own gift to his children, as the pledge of every other gift?⁴ And what other pledge can they need to encourage them to draw nigh with the largest desire, and the most heavenly expectation? We may indeed be too bold in our manner of approach to God;⁵ but we cannot be too bold in our expectations from him. Standing as we do upon such high and sure ground, it is equally dishonourable to him, and impoverishing to ourselves, to ask only a little of him. Rather let us, according to his own command, “open our mouths wide; and he will fill them.”⁶ Rather let us expect that he will *deal*—not

¹ Verse 77.² Verse 65. Comp. Psalm xiii. 6; cxvi. 7, 8.³ John xvi. 23, 24.⁴ Rom. viii. 32.⁵ A beautiful example of reverential reproach, and of the acceptance manifested, is given in Abram's history (Gen. xvii. 3.), and is in some degree illustrated by the private records of Luther.—Note on verses 147, 148.⁶ Psalm lxxxi. 10.

only favourably—but *bountifully with his servants*—that, as “our God, he will supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”¹

And indeed, the most experienced believer cannot forget, that he is in himself still the same poor, weak, empty, helpless creature as at first. Nothing therefore short of a *bountiful* supply can answer his emergency. Such a supply is always at hand. The act of prayer increases the power to pray. The throne of grace is a well, which no power or malice of the Philistines can stop up.² We need not say, “we have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.”³ Faith will enable us “with joy to draw water out of this well of salvation.”⁴ Let us bring our empty vessels, until there it not a vessel more.”⁵ Yes—believer—there is indeed a *bountiful* supply of grace—of every kind—suited to every want—grace to pardon—grace to quicken—grace to bless. Oh! see, then that you come not empty away. Remember—who it is that pleads before the throne. Remember,—that the grace you need is in his way. From eternity he foreknew your case. He laid your portion by. He has kept it for the time of need; and now he only waits for an empty vessel into which to pour his supply. He is ready to show you, how infinitely his grace exceeds all thoughts—all prayers—all desires—all praises.

And say—what has been the fruit of your pleading, waiting expectancy at “the throne of grace?” Have you not returned thence with a fresh spring of devotedness in this service, with every selfish thought forgotten in the desire, that you “*may live and keep his word.*” Nothing touched or moved your reluctant

¹ Phil. iv. 19.

² Com. Gen. xxvi. 15. *

³ John iv. 11.

⁴ Isaiah xii. 3.

⁵ Compare 2 Kings iv. 3—6.

heart, but the apprehension of *bountiful* redeeming love: but this makes obedience easy—delightful—natural—in a manner unavoidable. It “constrains”¹ to it. The man now *lives*—not the animal life of appetite—not the sensual life of vanity and pleasure—but the only life that deserves the name. He lives singly, supremely “to him that died for him, and rose again.”² He “*lives and keeps his word.*” His motto and character now is—“To me to live is Christ.”³ Nor indeed does the highest archangel, he that is nearest to the eternal throne, know a higher object of existence than this. And how encouraging the reflection, that in this glorious object the meanest servant in the household of God is an equal participant with the most blessed inhabitant of heaven!

18. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

IN order to “*keep God’s word,*” the Psalmist here prays, that he might understand it; and though under the teaching of the Spirit he had acquired “more understanding than all his teachers,”⁴ yet we find him ever coming to his God under a deep sense of his blindness and ignorance. And this is indeed the invariable effect of Divine teaching. Those, who have been best taught and longest taught, will be the most ready to “sit at the feet of Jesus,”⁵ as if they knew nothing, and had everything to learn. It is indeed an unspeakable mercy to know a little of the Lord, and at the same time to feel, that it is only a little that we do know. In this spirit we shall be longing to know

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14.

² 2 Cor. v. 15.

³ Phil. i. 21.

⁴ Verses 99, 100.

⁵ Luke x. 39.

more, and yet anxious to know nothing except as we are taught of God. There are indeed "*wondrous things*" to be known in *God's law*—things so *wondrous* that "the angels desire to look into them."¹ The exhibition of the scheme of redemption is in itself a world of wonders. The display of justice exercised in the way of mercy, and of mercy, glorified in the exercise of justice, is a wonder, that must fill the intelligent universe of God with everlasting astonishment. And yet these "*wondrous things*" are hid from multitudes, who are most deeply interested in the knowledge of them. They are "hid" not only from the careless and unconcerned, but "from the wise and prudent; and revealed" only "to babes"²—to those who are experimentally acquainted with that important truth, that a man "can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven."³ The largest and clearest print can never satisfy our sight, as long as a covering remains before our eyes. So neither can the Holy Scriptures enlighten the mind, until "the veil is taken away" from the heart. Oh! how needful then is the prayer—'Unveil⁴—"*Open thou mine eyes:*" Let the veil be taken away from the law that I may understand it; and from my heart that I may receive it.'

It is a most affecting consideration, that even Christians often find the word of God to be to them as a sealed book. They go through their accustomed portion without gaining any increasing acquaintance with the light, life and power of it, and without any distinct application of any part of its contents to their own experience. And thus it must be, whenever reading has been unaccompanied with prayer for Divine

¹ 1 Peter i. 12.

² Matt. xi. 25.

³ John iii. 27.

⁴ 'Revela oculos meos. Velamen detraha oculis meis.' Poli Synopsis.—Margin, Reveal. Compare 2 Cor. iii. 14—16.

influence and teaching. For we not only need to have our “*eyes open to behold*” fresh wonders, but also to maintain our perception of those wonders, which we have already beheld, that we may continue to behold them in a new and more spiritual light.

But are we conscious of our blindness? Then let us hear the counsel of our Lord, that we “anoint our eyes with eye-salve, that we may see.”¹ The recollection of the promises of Divine teaching are fraught with encouragement. The Spirit is freely and abundantly promised in this very character, as “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.”² If therefore we desire a clearer insight into these “*wondrous things*” of revelation—if we would behold the glorious beauty of our Immanuel—if we would comprehend something more of the immeasurable extent of that love, with which “God *so* loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son”³—and of that equally incomprehensible love, which moved that Son so cheerfully to undertake our cause,⁴ we must make daily, hourly use of this important petition—“*Open thou mine eyes.*”

19. *I am a stranger in the earth : hide not thy commandments from me.*

THE condition of man as a *stranger in the earth* may well give increasing earnestness to the petition, that the wonders of the revelation of God may be more fully opened to view. Thus we find, therefore, David reiterating his cry for Divine teaching—“*Hide not thy commandments from me.*” This confession, however, of his state in the world from a solitary

¹ Rev. iii. 18.

³ John iii. 16.

² Eph. i. 17.

⁴ Heb. x. 5—7.

wanderer would have had little comparative meaning ; but in the mouth of one, who was probably surrounded with every source of worldly enjoyment, it shows at once the vanity of “ earth’s best joys,” and the heavenly tendency of the religion of the Bible. This appears indeed to have been ever the character, confession, and glory of the Lord’s people.¹ They “ would not live always,”² and they gladly hear the warning voice, that minds them to “ arise and depart, for this is not their rest.”³ And was not this especially the character not of David only, but of David’s Lord ? Born at an inn⁴—not “ having where to lay his head ”⁵—suffering hunger⁶—subsisting upon alms⁷—neglected by his own⁸—“ looking for some to take pity, but there was none, and for his comforters, but he found none ”⁹—might he not justly take up the confession—“ *I am a stranger in the earth !* ”

If we consider this verse as descriptive of the condition of the child of God, it exhibits him in many most interesting points of view ; distant from his proper home¹⁰—without a fixed residence¹¹—with no particular interest in the world¹²—and submitting to all the inconveniences of a *stranger* on his journey homewards.¹³—Such is the *stranger’s* state ! And the word of God includes all that he wants—a guide, a guard, a companion—to direct, secure, and cheer his way. “ When thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee ; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”¹⁴ Most suitable then is his prayer—“ *Hide not thy commandments*

¹ Abraham, Gen. xxiii. 4. Jacob, Gen. xlvii. 9. David, Psalm xxxix. 12. All, Heb. xi. 13.

³ Micah ii. 10.

⁴ Luke ii. 7.

² Job vii. 16.

⁶ Matt. xxi. 18.

⁷ Luke viii. 3.

⁵ Matt. viii. 20.

⁹ Psalm lxi. 20.

¹⁰ Heb. xi. 9.

⁸ John i. 11.

¹² Phil. iii. 20.

¹³ Acts xiv. 22.

¹¹ 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

¹⁴ Prov. vi. 20—22.

from me.” Acquaintance with the word of God makes up all his hopes, and soothes all his sorrows. It supplies all the room of friends and counsellors. It furnishes light, joy, strength, food, armour, and whatever else the pilgrim may need on his way homewards.

Let us put this subject closely to ourselves. As rational creatures, we know that “our life is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”¹ As believers, we know that we cannot, and we would not call this world our home; and we are assured, that it is far better to be without it, than to have our portion in it. But do we never feel at home in the midst of our earthly comforts, and thus forget our proper character and our eternal prospects? Do we always live, speak, and act, as “*strangers in the earth?*” Does our conversation in the society of the world savour of the home whither we profess to be going? To feel ourselves “*strangers in the earth,*” and in the midst of the enjoyment of the gifts of God, to sit loose to them, as if our treasure were in heaven, is a sure mark of a right spirit. If the world, however, should be gaining ascendancy in our affections, let us only turn our eyes to the cross of Calvary. Let *that* be the object of our daily contemplation—the ground of our constant “glorifying;” and the world will then be to us as a “crucified” object.² And lastly, let us not forget, that we are looking forward, and making progress towards a world, where none are strangers—where all are children of one family, dwelling in one eternal home. “*In my Father’s house*”—said our gracious Head—“*are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you.*”³

¹ James iv. 14.

² Gal. vi. 14.

³ John xij. 2.

20. *My soul breaketh, for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.*

THIS language of the Christian's intense desire and affection is the natural result of the answer to his prayers—*Open thou mine eyes—Hide not thy commandments from me.* For who that is conversant with this blessed revelation can fail to have his whole soul filled with it? It is in fact the longing of the soul for more spiritual communion with the Saviour—“I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love. Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”¹ For is it not in the way of *his judgments* that the Church finds communion with her Lord?—“Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, *those that remember thee in thy ways.*”² In contrasting this with the church of Laodicea, under a brighter dispensation “neither cold nor hot;”³—which state, we may ask, most nearly resembles our own?—We may remark also not only the fervour, but the steady uniformity of this religion. It was not a rapture, but a habit; constant and uniform; “*at all times.*” With us, such enjoyments are too often favoured seasons, happy moments; alas! only moments—why not days, and months, and years? The object of our desires is a continual spring, that can never be exhausted. The affection—the longing of the soul, can never over-

¹ Cant. v. 8; viii. 6, 7.

² Isaiah lxiv. 5.

³ Rev. iii. 15.

reach its object. If therefore the desire is cherished, it will become the established habit—the element in which the child of God lives and thrives.

What then is the cause with us of the low ebbing of spiritual desire? Perhaps the throne of grace is not frequently visited. Or at least prayer for the influence of the Spirit is neglected. Or we have been unwatchful against a light, vain, and worldly spirit, than which nothing more tends to wither the growth of spiritual things. Or probably the workings of unbelief have been too faintly resisted. And this is of itself sufficient to account for much of our dulness; since the rule of procedure in the kingdom of grace is—“According to your faith be it unto you.”¹ Grace is indeed an insatiable principle. Enjoyment, instead of surfeiting, only serves to sharpen the appetite. Yet if we are content to live at a low rate, there will be no progress in fruitfulness, nor any sensible interest in the consolations of the gospel. We know, desire, and are satisfied with little; and *therefore* we enjoy but little. We live as borderers on the land, instead of being able to say,—“surely it floweth with milk and honey; and *this is the fruit of it.*” This is not the thriving, the cheerfulness, the adorning of the Gospel. It is rather the obscuring of the glory of our Christian profession, and of the happiness of its attendant privileges.

Let not the fervour of desire expressed in this verse be conceived to be out of reach; nor let it be expected in the way of some sudden manifestation or excitement. Rather let us look for it in a patient, humble, and persevering waiting upon the Lord. We may have still to complain of the coldness, weakness,

¹ Matthew ix. 29.

and wanderings of our spiritual affections. Yet strength to wait will be imperceptibly given : faith will be sustained for the conflict ; and thus our souls will “ make their boast in the Lord,” even though we should never be favoured with an excited flow of enjoyment.

At all events let us beware of resting satisfied with the confession of our lukewarmness to our fellow-creatures, without “ pouring out our heart before the Lord.” There is a fulness of grace in our glorious Head to “ strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die,” as well as at the beginning to “ quicken ” us when “ dead in trespasses and sins.” Abundant, also, are the promises and encouragements to poor, dry, barren souls —“ I will heal their backslidings—I will be as the dew unto Israel—he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.”¹ For what purposes are promises such as these given, but that they may be “ arguments ” wherewith to “ fill our mouth,” when in the contrition of faith we again venture from a backsliding state to “ order our cause before God ? ” And “ will he plead against us with his great power ? No—but he will put his strength in us ; ”² and we shall yet again “ run the way of his commandments ”³ with an enlarged heart.

¹ Hosea xiv. 4—6.

² Job xxiii. 4—6.

³ Verse 32.

21. *Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.*

LET the histories of Cain,¹ Pharaoh,² Haman,³ Nebuchadnezzar,⁴ and Herod,⁵ exhibit *the proud under the rebuke and curse* of God. He abhors their persons⁶ and their offerings;⁷ he “knows them afar off:”⁸ “he resisteth them:”⁹ “he scattereth them in the imaginations of their hearts.”¹⁰ Yet more especially hateful are they in his sight, when cloaking themselves under a spiritual garb—“which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou, *These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.*”¹¹ Most of all is this sin an abomination in his own beloved people. David¹² and Hezekiah¹³ are instructive beacons in the church, that they, least of all, whenever they give place to the workings of a proud heart, must expect to escape his rebuke—“Thou wast a God that forgavest them, *though thou tookest vengeance on their inventions;*”¹⁴ Something of pride probably influences all that “*do err from the Lord’s commandments;*” yet doubtless “the Righteous Judge” will mark an infinite difference between those *errors*, which arise from remaining imperfection of the renewed nature, and those which have their source in the obstinacy of the unrenewed heart. Those who are ready to confess collectively—“Who can understand his errors!”¹⁵—and individually

¹ Gen. iv. 5, 13—16. ² Exod. xiv. 15—31.

⁴ Dan. iv. 29—33.

⁵ Acts xii. 21—23.

³ Esther vii. 7—10.

⁶ Prov. vi. 16, 17.

⁷ Luke xviii. 11, 12, 14.

⁸ Psalm cxxxviii. 6.

⁹ 1 Peter v. 5, with Prov. iii. 34.

¹⁰ Luke i. 51.^o

¹¹ Isaiah ltv. 5, with Luke xviii. 11.

¹² 2 Sam. xxiv. 1—15.

¹³ 2 Kings xx. 12—18; 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

¹⁴ Psalm xcix. 8.

¹⁵ Psalm xix. 12.

—“ I have gone astray like a lost sheep ”¹—are widely different in character from the subjects of this *rebuke and curse of God*. “ *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes ; for their deceit is falsehood.* ”²

We wonder not at this expression of the mind of God concerning pride. There is no sin more abhorrent to his character. It is as if we were taking the crown from his head, and placing it upon our own. It is man making a god of himself—acting from himself, and for himself. Nor is this principle less destructive to our own happiness. And yet it is not only rooted, but it often rears its head and blossoms, and bears fruit in the hearts even of those who can truly say, they “ hate and abhor ” its influence. It is most like its father, the Devil, in serpentine deceitfulness. It is always active—always ready imperceptibly to mix itself up with every thing. When it is mortified in one shape, it rises in another. When we have thought that it was gone, in some unexpected moment we find it here still. It can convert every thing into nourishment, even God’s choicest gifts—yea, the graces of his Spirit. Let no saint therefore—however near he may be living to God, however favoured with the shinings of his countenance—consider himself beyond the reach of this temptation. Paul was most in danger when he seemed to be most out of it ; and nothing but an instant miracle of grace and power saved him from the “ snare of the Devil.”³ Indeed the whole plan of salvation is intended to humble the pride of man, by exhibiting his restoration to the Divine favour, as a free gift through the atoning blood of the cross.

¹ Verse 176.

² Verse 118.

³ See 2 Cor. xii. 7.

How hateful therefore is the resistance of proud flesh and blood to this humbling doctrine of the cross, and the humbling requisitions of the life of faith flowing from it! This makes the sure "foundation" of the believer's hope "a stone of stumbling" to the unbeliever's ruin.¹ As regards also the means of salvation—how can pride dare to lift up its head in the view of the Son of God—"taking upon him the form of a servant"—that he might bear the curse of man?² "Behold, the soul that is lifted up is not upright in him."³

But can a sinner—can a saint—be *proud*?—one that owes everything to free and sovereign grace—one that has wasted so much time—abused so much mercy—so grieved the Spirit of God—that has a heart so full of atheism—unbelief—selfishness? Nay the very pride itself should be the matter of the deepest daily humiliation; thus the remembrance of it may, under the mighty influences of the Spirit, prove an effectual means of subduing it in our hearts: thus we shall overcome corruption by its own workings, and meet our adversary with his own weapons. And if we should be unable entirely to restrain the influence of this cursed principle, yet the very sight of its corruption, will be overruled for our spiritual advancement.

O blessed end intended by the Lord's dealings with us! to "humble and to prove us"—"to know," and to make us know "what was in our heart, that he might do us good at the latter end!"⁴ Let us not frustrate his gracious intentions, or build again the things which he would have destroyed. May we love to lie low—lower than ever—ininitely low before him!

¹ Rom. ix. 32, 33. 1 Peter ii. 7, 8.

² Phil. ii. 5—8.

³ Hab. ii. 4.

⁴ Deut. viii. 2, 16.

‘ Lord! teach us to remember, that “ that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in thy sight.”¹ Teach us to bless thee for even thy sharp and painful discipline, that tends to subjugate this hateful pride of our hearts before our Saviour’s cross!

22. *Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.*

THE *proud under the rebuke of God* are usually distinguished by their enmity to his people. It is their delight to pour upon them “ *reproach and contempt,*” with no other provocation given, than that their obedience to the testimonies of God condemns their own neglect.² If therefore we are resolved to turn our backs upon the world, and to choose a decided contrary course, we must take this “ *reproach and contempt*” as our portion. Yet it is such a portion as Moses valued above all the treasures of the world;³ it is that reproach which our Master himself “ despised,” as “ reckoning it not worthy to be compared with” “ the joy that was set before him.”⁴ For did he bear his cross only on the way to Calvary? It was laid for every step in his path: it met him in every form of suffering, of “ *reproach and contempt.*” Look then at him as taking up his daily cross in the breathing of the atmosphere of a world of sin, and in the “ endurance of the contradiction of sinners against himself.”⁵ Mark him consummating his course of “ *reproach and contempt,*” “ by suffering without the gate”—and can we hesitate to “ go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach?”⁶ The trial however, especially if cast upon us by those whom we

¹ Luke xvi. 15.

² Heb. xi. 7.

³ Heb. xi. 24—26.

⁴ Heb. xii. 2.

⁵ Ib. xii. 3.

⁶ Ib. xiii. 12, 13.

have loved and valued, or by those whom we wish to love and value us—proves most severe; and the spreading our case, after David's example, before the Lord is the only preservation from faintness. "*Remove from me reproach and contempt.*" Perhaps "*contempt*" is more hard to bear than "*reproach.*" We are thought of, even by our enemies, so much better than we deserve, that it strikes with peculiar poignancy. Yet when the prayer of deprecation, as at another time,¹ is sent up in submission to our father's will, doubtless some answer, and *that* the right answer, will be given; and whether the "*reproach*" be removed, or "*grace*" vouchsafed "*sufficient*" to endure it,² the issue will prove alike for the glory of God, and the prosperity of our own souls.

But let us beware of that "*way of escape*" in returning to the world, which the insincere are ever ready to pursue. They dare not act to the full conviction of their consciences; they dare not confront their friends with the avowal of their full determination to form their conduct by the principles of the word of God. This is hard—this is impossible. They know not the "*victory that overcometh the world;*"³ and therefore cannot bear this mark upon their foreheads—"*These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.*"⁴ Far better, however, will be the heaviest oppression, under "*reproach and contempt,*" than any such endeavour to remove it from ourselves. The desire to escape the cross convicts the heart of unfaithfulness, and never fails to make way for tenfold difficulties in our path. Every compliance with the world against the voice of the word of God is a step into the by-path, which deviates wider and wider from the straight and

¹ See verse 134.

² See 1 John v. 4, 5.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

⁴ Rev. xxiv. 4.

narrow way, brings discredit upon our profession, proves a stumbling-block in the way of the weak, and will cause us, if not actually to come short at least to "*seem to come short of the promised rest.*"¹

But do we really find the weight of the cross "above that we are able?" He that bore it for us will surely enable us to bear it for him; and upheld by him, we cannot sink. It is a sweet exchange, by which the burden of sin is removed, and bound to his cross; and what remains to us is the lighter cross of "*reproach and contempt,*"—the badge of our discipleship.² If then we have the testimony of our consciences that in the midst of persecution from the world, we "*have kept his testimonies,*"³—here is our evidence of adoption, of our Father's special love, of the indwelling of his comforting, supporting Spirit.⁴ Here then is our warrant of hope, that the overwhelming weight will be removed from us; and that we shall be able to testify to our Master's praise in the churches of God, that "*his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.*"⁵

23. *Princes also did sit and speak against me; but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.*

DAVID might well give his testimony to the words of the Lord, that they were "*tried words;*"⁶ for perhaps no one had ever tried them more than himself, and certainly no one had more experience of their faithfulness, sweetness, and support. Saul and his "*princes might indeed sit and speak against him,*" but he had a resource of which they could never deprive him. "*Not as the world giveth, give I unto*

¹ Heb. iv. 1.

² Matt. xvi. 24.

³ Verses 61, 69, 87, 95, 110.

⁴ John xiv. 15—18, 21—23.

⁵ Matt. xi. 30.

⁶ Psalm xii. 7, Prayer-book Translation.

you.”¹ As our blessed Master was employed in communion with his Father, and delighting in his work at the time, when the “*princes did sit and speak against him;*”² so under similar circumstances of trial, in the history of this faithful servant of God, the habit of *meditation in the Lord’s statutes* extracted spiritual food for his support: and in this strength of his God he was enabled to “suffer according to his will, and to commit the keeping of his soul to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator.”³

But this form of trial was not peculiar to the history of David. The children of Israel in Egypt;⁴ Daniel in Babylon;⁵ and the disciples of Christ in the early ages of the church,⁶ have severally found “the same afflictions to be accomplished in themselves.” Never, indeed, has Christ’s “kingdom been of this world.”⁷ “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”⁸ And perhaps this is one of the wise and gracious reasons of our trials, to make the word of God more precious by the experience of its sustaining consolations, in an hour when the arm of human power may be opposed to us. Often indeed from a want of a present application of the word, Christians, and especially young Christians, are in danger of being put to rebuke by the scorner’s sneer. In the habit of Scriptural *meditation*, they will realize a present God, speaking “words of spirit and life” to their souls. The importance therefore of an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with this precious book cannot be too highly estimated. In the appalling conflicts of the Christian’s warfare, it is “the sword of the Spirit,”⁹ which if it be kept bright

¹ John xiv. 27.

³ 1 Peter iv. 19.

⁵ Dan. vi. 4—6.

⁷ John xviii. 36.

² John xi. 47, 54—57.

⁴ Exodus i. 10.

⁶ Matt. x. 17, 18. Acts iv. 27—29.

⁸ John iii. 1.

⁹ Eph. vi. 17.

by constant use, will never be wielded without the victory of faith. So many reasons may be drawn from thence against fainting under persecution, that the believer may ever be ready to "thank God, and to take courage."¹ Christ has left it indeed as the portion of his people—"In the world ye shall have tribulation;" counterbalanced however most abundantly by the portion which they enjoy in him—"In me ye shall have peace."² If therefore the one half of this portion may seem hard, the legacy entire is such as no servant of Christ can refuse to accept, or indeed will receive without thankfulness.

24. *Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors.*

WHAT could we want more in a time of difficulty than comfort and direction? David had both these blessings. As the fruit of his "*meditation in the Lord's statutes,*" in his distress they were his "*delight*;" in his seasons of perplexity they were his "*counsellors.*" And so wisely did they direct his general course,³ that, though "*princes sat and spake against him,*" they "could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him."⁴ The testimonies of God were truly "*the men of his counsel.*"⁵ He guided his own conduct by the rules laid before him in the book of God, as if he was having recourse to the most experienced counsellors, or rather as if the prophets of his God were giving the word from his mouth.⁶ Thus the child of God has his council, as

¹ Acts xxviii. 15.

² John xvi. 33. See the beautiful illustration of this *whole declaration*—Acts xvi. 22—25.

³ 1 Sam. xviii. 14. Ps. ci. 2.

⁴ Dan. vi. 4, 5.

⁵ Margin.

⁶ Comp. 2 Samuel vii. 4, 5; also xvi. 23.

well as the Sovereign. On one side we see here Saul and his counsellors¹—on the other side, David and the *testimonies of his God*. Which, think we, was better furnished with that “wisdom which is profitable to direct?” Subsequently, as a king, David was constrained to make “*the testimonies of God his counsellors;*”² and probably to his constant regard to their voice he owed much of his earthly prosperity.³

Now—do we improve the privilege of being counselled in all our difficulties by the word of God? Then surely the recollection of our privilege must increase our “*delight*” in it. Those who take up the word of God without interest, will find no light in it: while those who make it their “*delight*” will never fail to find it their “*Counsellors.*” But if we wish for the enjoyment of its holy delight and spiritual counsel in times of perplexity, we shall find a mere cursory reading of it of little avail. It must be brought home to our own experience, and consulted on those trivial occasions of every day’s occurrence, when, unconscious of our need of divine direction, we are too often inclined to lean to our own counsel. The Christian is a man of faith every step of his way. And this habitual use and daily familiarity with *the testimonies of God* will reflect a Divine light upon all the dark turns of his heavenly road. The word will be to him as a “pillar and a cloud;”⁴ as the “Urim and Thummim:”⁵ an infallible guide and *counsellor*.

Sometimes, however, perplexity arises from the conflict, not between conscience and sinful indulgence, (in which case Christian sincerity would always

¹ Verse 23.

² Deut. xvii. 18—20.

³ 2 Sam. viii. 6, 14. Compare also his dying and most encouraging advice to Solomon on this subject, founded doubtless upon the recollection of his own experience, 1 Kings ii. 3.

⁴ Numbers ix. 15—23.

⁵ Numbers xxvii. 21.

determine the path,) but between duty and duty. When, however, the secret claims of acknowledged obligations seem to interfere with each other, the counsel of the word will mark their relative importance, connexion and dependence: their suitability to present circumstances in providence; their probable influence upon the present frame and acting principles of the heart; the guidance, which has been vouchsafed to the Lord's people in similar emergencies; and the light, which the daily routine of the life of our Great Exemplar exhibits before us. The great concern, however, is to cultivate the habit of mind, which falls in most naturally with the counsel of the word. "Walking in the fear of the Lord,"¹ in a simple spirit of dependence,² and torn away from the idolatry of taking counsel from our own hearts, we cannot *materially* err; because there is *here a suitability between the disposition and the promise*—a watchfulness against the impetuous bias of the flesh; a paramount regard to the glory of God, and a meek submission to his gracious appointment. If the counsel however should not prove infallible, the fault is not in the word, but in the indistinctness of our own perception. We want not a clearer rule, or a surer guide, but a more single eye. And if, after all, it may not mark every precise act of duty (for to do this "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written,") yet it determines the standard, to which the most minute acting of the mind should be brought;³ and the disposition, which will reflect the light of the will of God upon our path.⁴

But let it be remembered, that any want of sincerity

¹ See Numb. xxv. 12, 14.

² Numb. xxv. 4, 5, 9; Ps. cxliii. 8.

³ 1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17.

⁴ Matt. vi. 22, 23.

in the heart¹—any allowance of self-dependence²—will always close the avenues of this Divine light and counsel. We are often unconsciously “walking in the light of our own fire, and in the sparks that we have kindled.”³ Perhaps we sought, as we conceived, the guidance of the Lord’s counsel, and suppose that we are walking in it. But, in the act of seeking, and as the preparation for seeking, did we feel the necessity of subjecting our motives and inclinations to a strict, cautious, self-suspecting scrutiny? Was the heart schooled to the discipline of the cross? Was “every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?”⁴ Or was not our mind and heart possessed with the object, before counsel was sought at the mouth of God? Oh! how careful should we be to walk warily in those uncertain marks of heavenly counsel that fall in with the bias of our own inclination! How many false steps in the record of past experience may be traced to the counsel of our own hearts, sought and followed to the neglect of the counsel of God;⁵ while no circumstance of perplexity can befall us in the spirit of humility, simplicity, and sanctity, when the counsel of the Lord will fail!

An undue dependence upon human counsel,⁶ whether of the living or the dead, may also operate unfavourably to the reception of the full influence of the counsel of the word. However valuable such counsel may be, and however closely it may agree with the word, we must not forget, that it is not the word—that it is fallible—and therefore must never be resorted to in the first place, or followed with that full reliance, which we are warranted to place on the

¹ 1 Sam. xxviii. 6. Ezek. xiv. 2—4.

³ Isaiah l. 11.

⁵ Josh. ix. 14. Isaiah xxx. 1—3.

² Prov. iii. 5, 6.

⁴ 2 Cor. x. 5.

⁶ Isa. ii. 22.

revelation of God. On the other hand, what is it to have God's word as our "*Counsellor*?" Is it not to have himself—"the only wise God?" When our Bibles in seasons of difficulty are searched in a humble, prayerful, teachable spirit, we are as much depending upon the Lord himself for counsel, as if we were listening to an immediate revelation from heaven. We want not a new revelation, or a sensible voice from above, for every fresh emergency. It is enough, that our Father has given us this blessed "word as a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path."¹

Let me then inquire what is the counsel of God, that speaks directly to myself? If I am an unawakened sinner, it warns me to turn from sin²—it invites me to the Saviour³—it directs me to wait upon God.⁴ If I am a professor slumbering in the form of godliness, words of gracious counsel are offered to show me my real condition⁵—to instruct me in the all-sufficiency of Christ,⁶ and to caution me of the danger of hypocrisy.⁷ If through grace I am made a child of God, still do I need my Father's counsel to recover me from perpetual back-sliding⁸—to excite me to increased watchfulness,⁹ and to strengthen my confidence in the fulness of his grace¹⁰ and the faithfulness of his love.¹¹ Ever shall I have reason for the grateful acknowledgment—"I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel."¹² And every step of my way would I desire to advance, glorifying my God and Father, in the expression of my confidence in his counsel unto the end—"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory."¹³

¹ Verse 105.² Prov. i. 24—31. Ezek. xxxiii. 11.³ Isaiah lv. i. John vii. 37.⁴ Hosea xii. 6.⁵ Rev. iii. 17.⁶ Rev. iii. 18.⁷ Luke xii. 6.⁸ Jer. iii. 12, 13.⁹ 1 Thess. v. 6. Rev. iii. 2.¹⁰ Isaiah xxvi. 4.¹¹ Heb. xii. 5, 6.¹² Psalm xvi. 7.¹³ Psalm lxxiii. 24.

PART IV.

25. *My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word.*

SIN is no trifle to a child of God. It is his greatest — his heaviest — sorrow. Thus David — thus the Great Apostle — found it.¹ And where is the believer, who has not full sympathy with their complaints? To have a *soul cleaving to the dust*, and not to feel the trouble, is the black mark of a sinner, dead in sins — dead to God. To “know the plague of our own heart,”² to feel our misery, to believe and to apply the remedy,³ is the satisfactory evidence of a child of God. *Dust* is the portion of the world; and they wish for no better. But that the soul of the man of God should continually *cleave to the dust* is most strange and humbling, and yet such is the influence of his evil nature — such the power of self-will and self-indulgence — such the regard to human praise, and cherishing of self-admiration, that were it not that he “abhors himself” for the very *dust that cleaves* to him, he would question the existence of a renewing change. He knows what he ought to be. He has tasted the blessedness of “mounting upward on eagles’ wings.”⁴ And yet every attempt to rise is hindered by the clogging weight that keeps him down. But it is the *cleaving of his soul* that is so painful — not occasional, but constant — not like the bird of the morning that descends for a moment, and then soars his upward

¹ Psalm xxxviii. 4. Rom. vii. 24.

² Rom. vii. 24, 25.

³ 1 Kings viii. 38.

⁴ Isaiah xl. 31.

flight; but it seems, as if like the “serpent—dust was to be his meat;”¹ as if the spiritual heaven-born soul was to sink and grovel below. And then, as the dust of the summer road blinds the eye, and obscures the prospect; how does this earthliness of soul darken the view of the Saviour, dim the eye of faith, and hide the glorious prospects, which, when beheld in the clear horizon, enliven the weary pilgrim on his heavenly way!

But this complaint is the language of conflict and humiliation—not of despondency. Mark the believer carrying it to the Lord—‘Here I lie in the *dust*, without life or power. Oh! thou Saviour, who “camest that I might have life, and that I might have it more abundantly”²—*Quicken me*. Breathe upon me thine own life, that I may rise from the *dust* and *cleave* to thee.’ This cry for quickening grace is the exercise of faith. We have a covenant to plead. Faith is the hand that takes hold of the promise—“*according to thy word.*” Can this word fail? “Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or one tittle pass” from the engagements of a covenant-keeping God. “He is faithful that hath promised.”³ The man who takes hold of this plea, is “a Prince who has power with God, and prevails.”⁴

But how different is the character of the mere professor! ready probably to make the same confession, yet without humiliation, without prayer, without faith. Nothing is more common than to hear the complaint—“*My soul cleaveth unto the dust.*”—The world has such power over us—we are so cold—so dead to spiritual things;’ while perhaps the complaint is never once brought with wrestling suppli-

¹ Isaiah lxxv. 25.

² John x. 10.

³ Heb. x. 23, with Luke xxi. 33.

⁴ Gen. xxxii. 28.

cation, but rather urged in indolent self-complacency, as an evidence of the good state of the heart before God. Yet it is not the complaint of sickness, but an application to the physician, that advances the recovery of the patient. We do not usually expect to better our condition, by mourning over its badness, or merely wishing for its improvement. Nor is it the confession of sin, but the application to the Great Physician, that marks genuine contrition before God. That confession, which evaporates in heartless complaints, belongs not to the tenderness of a heart, whose secret springs have been touched by Divine grace. But the utterance of prayer, flowing from the expression of complaint, is the voice of God's own "Spirit making intercession for us;" and then indeed how cheering the encouragement, that he "that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."¹ Some are ready to give up or delay their duty, when they have been unable to bring their heart to it. Thus does 'Satan get advantage of us' by our 'ignorance of his devices.' *Quickening* grace is not the ground or warrant for duty. Indisposition to duty is not our weakness, but our sin—not therefore to be indulged, but resisted. We must mourn over the dulness that hinders us, and diligently wait for the 'help we every moment need.' God keeps the grace in his own hands, to exercise our daily dependence upon him. But the door will not long be shut to him, who has faith and patience to wait until it is opened.

Now let me shift the character of my profession. Is it an habitual, persevering, overcoming conflict

¹ Romans viii. 26, 27.

with sin? Do I not sometimes indulge in fruitless bemoanings of my state, when I had far better be exercising myself in vigorous actings of grace? If I find “*my soul cleaving to the dust?*” Am I not sometimes “lying on my face,”¹ when I ought to be “taking heaven by violence,”² by importunate petitions for *quicken- ing* grace? Are my prayers invigorated by confidence in the word of God? Oh! let me remember, that “they that wait upon the Lord,” shall shake off *the dust* to which they have *cleaved* so long, and “shall mount with wings like eagles,”³ to take possession of their heavenly home.

O Lord! make me more deeply ashamed, that “*my soul should cleave to the dust.*” Breathe upon me fresh influence from thy *quicken- ing* Spirit. Help me to plead thy word of promise; and oh! may every fresh view of my sinfulness, while it prostrates me in self-abasement before thee, be overruled to make the Saviour daily and hourly more precious to my soul. For, defiled as I am in myself, in every service of my heart, what but the unceasing application of his blood, and the uninterrupted prevalence of his intercession, gives me a moment’s confidence before thee, or prevents the very sins that mingle with my prayers from sealing my condemnation? Blessed Saviour! it is nothing but thy everlasting merit, covering my person, and honouring my sacrifice, that satisfies the justice of an offended God, and restrains it from breaking forth as a devouring fire to consume me upon my very knees!

¹ Josh. vii. 10.

² Matt. xi. 12.

³ Isaiah xl. 31.

26. *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me ;
teach me thy statutes.*

A BEAUTIFUL description of the "simplicity and godly sincerity"¹ of the believer's "walk with God!" He spreads his whole case before his God, "*declaring his ways*" of conduct with filial confidence, *his ways* of difficulty with holy fellowship, and *his ways* of sinfulness with tender contrition. It is his delight to acquaint him with all his undertakings; to receive his direction; and to tell him his distress, that he may be guided by his counsel, confirmed by his strength, pitied by his love, and delivered by his power.² And how sweet, above all, to overcome his strangeness under a sense of guilt, and to lay open "*his ways*" of sin before him "without partiality and without hypocrisy!"³ Then indeed he is enabled to say—"Thou heardest me." "*When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*"⁴ While the voice of ingenuous confession was suppressed, cries and lamentations were disregarded. It was not the voice of the penitent child; and therefore "where was the sounding of his father's bowels, and of his mercies towards him?"⁵ But now, on the first utterance of confession from his lips, or rather on the first purpose of contrition formed in his heart; "while he is yet speaking,"⁶ the full and free pardon, which had been signed in heaven, comes down with royal parental love to his soul—"I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."⁷ Oh! what cannot

¹ Prov. iii. 6.

² Comp. Psalm xxxiv. 4—6.

³ Comp. Psalm li. 3; lxix. 5.

⁴ Ib. xxxii. 3.

⁵ Isaiah lxiii. 15.

⁶ Daniel ix. 20.

⁷ Psalm xxxii. 5. 2 Sam. xii. 13. Comp. Jer. iii. 12, 13.

the child of God testify, in the same spirit of ingenuous confession, of the more than parental tenderness with which "his transgression is forgiven, and his sin covered."¹ And yet how necessary to the free *declaration of our ways* is an acquaintance with the way of forgiveness! If our great High Priest had not passed into the heavens, how awful would have been the thought that "all things were naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do!" We could only then have thought of "covering our transgressions as Adam, by hiding our iniquity in our bosom."² But now even though "*our ways*" are so defiled, so crooked, that we are made to abhor ourselves on account of them, we are yet encouraged boldly to "*declare*" them all before God with the assurance of finding pardon, acceptance, and seasonable supply of grace."³

And thus does the child of God gain confidence in prayer for the continual teaching of his Father's Spirit. The same heavenly guidance that brought him into the way of return, he needs for every successive step to the end—"Teach me thy way, O Lord: I will walk in thy truth."⁴ "*I have declared my*" ignorance, my sinfulness, and my whole experience before thee, looking for thy pardoning mercy, thy teaching Spirit, and assisting grace—"And thou hast heard me." O continue to me what thou hast been, and *teach me* more of thyself!

But are we sincere in our dealings with God? Are we *daily* opening our hearts before him? How often do we treat our Almighty friend as a stranger! as if we were weary of dealing with him. And even when we do "*declare our ways*" before him, are we not

¹ Compare Psalm xxxii. 1. Luke xv. 18—22. Prov. xxviii. 13.

² Job xxxi. 33. ³ Heb. iv. #3—16. ⁴ Psalm lxxxvi. 11.

often content to leave it as a matter of uncertainty whether he has heard us or not? We think too little of the importance of watching for an answer to our prayers. It is this that encourages us to pray again.¹ It gives such a sweetness to the mercies received, when they come to us marked with this inscription—“Received by prayer.” It is not our inevitable weakness,² nor our lamented dulness,³ nor our abhorred wanderings,⁴ nor our opposed distractions,⁵ nor our mistaken unbelief;⁶ it is not any, no, nor all these, that can shut out our prayer. If “iniquity” is not “regarded in our heart,” we may always hear our Saviour’s voice—“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”⁷

Here is the believer’s echo to this gracious voice—*“I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.”*⁸

27. *Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

MARK the reiterated cries of the man of God for heavenly light—*Teach me thy statutes—make me to*

¹ Psalm cxvi. 1, 2.

² Rom. vii. 21.

³ Mark xiv. 38, 40.

⁴ Verse 113.

⁵ Psalm lxxxvi. 11, last clause.

⁶ Mark ix. 22, 24.

⁷ John xvi. 23, 24.

⁸ Every way worthy of that great man, and a most instructive illustration of Christian sincerity, was the resolution of President Edwards: ‘Resolved to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz., with the greatest openness to *declare my ways to God*, and lay open my soul to him—all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and every thing, and every circumstance, according to Dr. Manton’s twenty-seventh sermon on the cxix. Psalm.’ Resol. 65. Extracted from his Diary. *Works*, vol. i. 16.

understand the way of thy precepts. The "need and the encouragement for these cries is equally manifest. Who has ever been known to *understand the way of himself?* And to whom—walking in a well-ordered conversation—has the Lord ever failed to show it? ¹ A man untaught by the Spirit of God may be able to criticize, write, and speak, of the word of God, and may discover much, and explain much to others, of the beauty and importance of its contents. But such a prayer as this has never ascended from his heart; and perhaps the necessity of it has never occurred to his mind. And doubtless from this neglect of prayer for Divine illumination, have arisen those false and unscriptural doctrines, which crude, unexercised minds have too hastily embraced. Instead of humbly and simply asking—"*Make me to understand the way of thy precepts*"—men too often "lean to their understanding," trust to the bias of their own judgment, and are "vainly puffed up" with their own notions, "by their fleshly mind, *not holding the Head.*" ² Thus becoming "unstable and unlearned men, they wrest the Scriptures"—except the sovereign grace of God interpose—"unto their own destruction." ³

Never must we forget, that Teaching from above is indispensable to a right knowledge of the most simple truths of the word of God. Carnal prejudice and wilful ignorance, pervert the understanding; "spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned." ⁴ But by this heavenly teaching, the deeper and more mysterious truths (so far as they are needful to be understood) are manifested with the same clearness, as the elements of the doctrines of God—"Eye hath not seen,

¹ See Psalm l. 23.

³ 2 Peter iii. 16.

² Col. ii. 18, 19.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit. Now we have received—not the spirit of the world, *but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given to us of God.*"¹ Wonderful indeed is this revelation, when "the Father of glory gives unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened." "The hope of his calling—the riches of the glory of his inheritance in his saints—the exceeding greatness of his power" manifested to, and wrought in, his people—no other or less than that "which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead,"²—these are indeed "the deep things of God," the present and eternal portion of his saints. In this *way* of Divine light the believer would be always walking, until the new man "grows up unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." The smallest attainment in this knowledge is to him, (as it will at the great day be manifested to the world) of infinitely greater value than the highest intelligence in the field of earthly sciences.

And then—the object, for which he desires this, *understanding*, marks the simplicity of his heart—"So shall I talk of thy wondrous works." He desires to know more of *this way*, that he may commend it to others. It is not that he may be pleased with himself, and indulge in a self-complacent view of his attainments; but that God may be more admired by him and "glorified in him,"³ and that he may advance himself, and lead others forward, in the fear, love, obedience, and praise of God.

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10, 12. ² Eph. i. 17—20. ³ Gal. i. 24. Matt. v. 16.

It is a frequent complaint with Christians, that they are straitened in religious conversation, and often feel unable to speak “to the use of edifying, that they may minister grace to the hearers.”¹ Here then is the secret disclosed, by which we shall be kept from the danger of dealing in unfelt truths, and “out of the abundance of the heart our mouths will speak.”² Seek to have the heart searched, cleansed, filled with the graces of the Spirit. Humility, teachableness, simplicity, will bring light into the understanding, influence the heart, “open the lips,” and unite every member that we have in the service and praise of God.

28. *My soul melteth for heaviness; strengthen thou me according unto thy word.*

How—it may be asked—can the lot of the people of God be so enviable, when they confess their *souls to be melting for heaviness*—groaning under the incessant and wearisome conflict? But this—be it remembered—is only “for a season.” “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”³ There is a “needs be” for it while it remains; and in the end it will “be found unto praise and honour, and glory.”⁴ Never perhaps are their graces more lively, or the ground of their assurance more clear, than in these sorrowing seasons of conflict. They complain, indeed, of the diversified power of indwelling sin. But their very complaints are the evidence of the mighty working of the power of indwelling grace. For what is it but the principle of faith, that makes unbelief their burden? What but hope, that struggles

¹ Eph. iv. 29.

² Matt. xii. 34.

³ Psalm xxx. 5.

⁴ 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

with their tears? What but love that makes their coldness a grief to them? What but humility, that causes them to loathe their pride? What but the secret spring of thankfulness, that shows them their unthankfulness, and shames them for it? And therefore the very depth of "that heaviness which melts their souls" away, is the exhibition of the strength and establishment of God's work within, upholding them in perseverance of conflict to the end. Would not the believer then, when eyeing in his heaviest moments the most prosperous condition of the ungodly, say—"Let me not eat of their dainties!"¹ Far better, and, we may add, far happier, is godly sorrow than worldly joy. In the midst of his misery, the Christian would not exchange his hope in the gospel—though often obscured by unbelief, and clouded by fear—for "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." "The heart knoweth his own bitterness: but a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy."² Yet indeed there is a bitterness that is keenly felt. Sin is a source of daily heaviness—as displeasing to a tender and gracious Father³—as having pierced the heart that loves him,⁴ and shed the blood that saves him—and as "grieving"⁵ that beloved friend—the indwelling Comforter of his soul. God therefore expects to see him a mourner; and he feels he has reason enough to mourn—"My soul melteth for heaviness."

But this cry of distress is sometimes the utterance of the child under the needful chastisement of a father's love. The world is dethroned, but not

¹ Psalm cxli. 4.

² Prov. xiv. 10. 'A good man lying on his bed of sickness, and being asked—which were the most comfortable days that he ever knew? cried out—O give me my mourning days; give me my mourning days again, for they were the joyfulest days that ever I had.'—*Brooke's Works.*

³ Psalm li. 4.

⁴ Zech. xii. 10.

⁵ Eph. iv. 30.

extirpated in the heart. Much remains to be purged, much dross is yet to be removed. The sources of the too attractive earthly joy must be embittered : and now it is that the discipline of the cross forces the cry "*My soul melteth for heaviness.*" Yet in the midst of heaviness the child of God cannot forget that he is loved—that he is saved ; and the recollection of this sovereign mercy seems to make the tears with which he mourned for sin, tears of joy.

But this *heaviness*—however it may *melt our souls*—has not wrought its appointed work, until it has bowed us before the throne of grace with the heart-felt pleading cry of faith—*strengthen thou me.* And how surely shall we then find, that no burden, trial, conflict, or difficulty, however great, can stand before Almighty strength—"Fear not, thou worm Jacob ; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small."¹ And especially when the plea is drawn, as it is repeatedly in this Psalm,² from the word and promise of God—"according to thy word"—our success is assured. For what does that word assure us ? "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."³ "Will he plead against me"—said Job—"with his great power ? No ; but he will put strength in me."⁴ Thus David found it in his own case—"In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."⁵ Thus also to the Apostle was the word of promise given and fulfilled—"My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."⁶ And who does not find, that "the God of Israel is" still "he, that giveth strength and power unto his people ;"⁷ still the

¹ Isaiah xli. 14, 15.

² Verses 25, 41, 58, &c.

³ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

⁴ Job xxiii. 6.

⁵ Psalm cxxxviii. 3.

⁶ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁷ Psalm lxviii. 35.

same "faithful God, who will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it?"¹

When we are most sensible of our utter helplessness, and most simple in our reliance upon divine strength, then it is that the "*soul melting for heaviness*,"—is most especially upheld and established. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop, but a good word maketh it glad."² And how reviving is that "good word" of the Gospel, which proclaims the Saviour, anointed to "give the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,"³ and gifted with "the tongue of the learned, that he might know how to speak a word in season unto him that is weary!"⁴ And no less encouraging is it to view Him "*melting for heaviness*"—"being sore amazed and very heavy,"⁵ under the accumulated weight of imputed guilt; learning by this bitter discipline, "in that he himself suffered being tempted, to succour them that are tempted."⁶ Yet was he, like his faithful servant, supported *according to his Father's word*, when, in the moment of his bitterest agony, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him."⁷ And this faithful support vouchsafed to the Head is the seal and pledge of what every member in every trouble will most assuredly enjoy. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in his people, so their consolation also aboundeth by Christ."⁸ The blessed word will supply all their need—life for their quickening, light for their direction, comfort for their enjoyment, strength for their support—"Strengthen thou me according unto thy word."

¹ 1 Cor. x. 13.

² Prov. xii. 25.

³ Isaiah lxi. 3.

⁴ Ib. l. 4.

⁵ Mark xiv. 33.

⁶ Heb. ii. 18.

⁷ Luke xxii. 43.

⁸ 2 Cor. i. 5.

Lord, may I ever be kept from despondency—regarding it as sinful in itself, dishonourable to thy name, and weakening to my soul; and though I must “needs be sometime in heaviness through manifold temptations,” yet let the power of faith be in constant exercise, that I may be able to expostulate with my soul—“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”¹

29. *Remove from me the way of lying; and grant me thy law graciously.*

EVERY deviation in principle and conduct from the strait and narrow path, is a “*way of lying*.” Every traveller in the way is the victim of his own delusion. “He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say—Is there not a lie in my right hand?”² How needful then is the prayer—“*Remove from me the way of lying*.” If at any time we “should be removed from him that called us into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;”³ if erroneous views of doctrine should find a place in our system of faith; if our dependence upon Christ should be mixed with a secret leaning to our own strength or wisdom, then indeed, this prayer will apply most fitly to our case. And if, as the natural consequence of doctrinal errors, any looseness or inconsistency should be marked in our practice; if there should be any undue concessions to the world, any allowed sinful indulgence in the heart, any shrinking from the daily cross, then indeed will

¹ Psalm xlii. 11.

² Isaiah xlii. 20.

³ Gal. i. 6.

there be fresh occasion for this prayer—“*Remove from me the way of lying.*”—Most justly are ways such as these called “*ways of lying.*” They promise what it is impossible, in the nature of things, that they can ever perform; and prove to their deluded followers that “they that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy.”¹ We can be at no loss to trace these “*ways of lying*” to their proper source—to him, who, “when he speaketh a lie, speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”² As, in the first instance of transgression, “he beguiled Eve through his subtilty;”³ so it is his constant employment throughout a world lying under his sway, to beguile the blinded “children of disobedience”⁴ into the awful deception of mistaking their God, and into the blind choice of preferring “broken cisterns” to “the fountain of living water.”⁵

The means of the *removal of the way of lying from us* will be found in this prayer. “Grant me thy law *graciously*”—not in the mere notional apprehension; but *the law*, according to the covenant promise, “put into our minds, and written in our hearts;”⁶ producing delightful freedom—conformity. This application of *the law* under Divine teaching introduces the light, and infuses the “savour, of the knowledge of Christ” into the heart. And thus truth will gradually extirpate “*lying* :” Christ will reign instead of Belial.

As a safeguard from this evil, and a means of practical good, we may here remark the importance of “keeping our hearts with all diligence; for out of

¹ Jonah ii. 8.

² John viii. 44.

³ Gen. iii. 1—6, with 2 Cor. xi. 3.

⁴ Rev. xii. 9, with 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.

⁵ Jer. ii. 13.

⁶ Heb. viii. 10.

them are the issues of life.”¹ They are the leading wanderers that mislead the rest. Wherever we see wandering eyes, wandering feet, and a wandering tongue, all flow from a heart, that has taken its own liberty in wandering from God. Let then the “law” be our rule, and the Spirit—even “the Spirit of Truth”—our guide; and we shall be directed and kept in the way, so clearly set out for us in the word of God. And well will it be for us carefully to mark the gracious answers to this prayer, in a clearer perception of the truth of the law of God, a more sensitive shrinking from forbidden objects, and a more devoted attachment to the way of truth.

30. *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

ONLY two ways lie before us for our choice—“*the way of lying*,” and “*the way of truth* :”—God by the light of his word guiding us into one—Satan by his temptations alluring us into the other. *The way of lying* is the natural choice of man. *The choice of the way of truth* is the Lord’s work in the hearts of his people—his seal of special, eternal love. His teaching shows us *the way*; ² and his grace enables us to “choose” it.³ And has any believer, in the subsequent course of his experience, found reason to alter his first determination? Does Mary regret the choice which she made?⁴ One, whose solid and reflecting judgment was not likely to make a rash or hasty choice, tells us, in reference to the outset of his course — “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” And so far from repenting

¹ Prov. iv. 23.

² Psalm xxv. 4; xxxii. 8. Isa. xlviii. 17.

³ Psalm cx. 3. Isa. xlv. 3—5.

⁴ Luke x. 42.

of his choice, the experience of twenty years only served to confirm him in it; and he repeats his determination, with increasing energy of expression; “*Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*”¹ In the same spirit one of the ancient fathers expresses himself: ‘If I have any possessions, health, credit, learning—this is all the contentment I have of them—that I may have *something to despise for Christ, who comprises in his own person all and every thing that is most desirable.*’²

In comparing, however, this verse with the preceding, we remark a striking illustration of the bias of the believer’s heart. His experience of the deceitfulness of sin, Satan, and his own heart stirs up the prayer—“*Remove from me the way of lying.*” But his choice is expressed in this verse—“*I have chosen the way of truth.*” The sincere desire to have “*the way of lying removed from us,*” is a clear evidence that we have already “*chosen the way of truth;*” that the Spirit of truth hath guided us to him,³ who is indeed “*the way of truth*”—the true and only way to God!⁴ And of all ways that could be set before the Christian, this is the way he would “*choose*”—as bringing most glory to his God, exalting the Saviour, honouring the Spirit of God, and securing the salvation of his own soul. Whatever becomes of me—the Christian would feel—‘I would have no other way than this. Yea, though I should perish, I would abide in it. So transcendent is the discovery which it affords of the glory of God—scarcely less clear than the glory of heaven itself.

¹ Phil. iii. 7, 8.

² ‘Totus desirabilis et totum desirabile.’—Greg. Naz. Orat. i.

³ John xvi. 13, 14.

⁴ Ib. xiv. 6.

The practical pathway, however, is often rugged—always narrow. We may have to encounter not only the reviling and the sneer of an ungodly world, but even the suspicions of our brethren, who may not always be able to understand our motives. Yet if our heart is upright with God, “none of these things will move us.” Our choice is made, and we are prepared to abide the cost.¹

But that our choice may be daily established, let us not forget the treasury of our life, light, and grace. Let us lay “*the judgments of God before us.*” For we have always some new lesson to learn—some new duty to perform—some new snare to avoid. We must therefore walk by rule²—as under the eye of a jealous God, who enlightens and cheers our path—under the eye of the ungodly, who watch for our halting—under the eye of weak Christians, who might be stumbled by our unsteady walk—under the eye of established Christians, who will be yet further established by the testimony of our consistent profession. What a stay do the promises of the Gospel afford for this strict and accurate walk! All is given that is needed. The obedience that is enjoined is secured. “God working in us,”³ enables us to work for him; and while we are humbly looking for further supplies, and diligently improving what has been already bestowed, he is pledged by promise to assist,⁴ as we are bound by duty to obey.

What then—let me inquire—is the choice which I have made? I would remember it is for eternity. And if, through the grace that has first chosen me, “*I have chosen the way of truth,*” is the effect of this

¹ Luke xiv. 28. Acts xx. 24.

³ Phil. ii. 12, 13. Isa. xxvi. 12

² See Gal. vi. 16. Phil. iii. 16.

⁴ Isa. xli. 10. Zech. x. 12.

choice daily visible in a life and conversation well-ordered according to the word of God? If it is good to "hide that word in my heart,"¹ as a safe-guard against sin, it is good also "to lay before" my eyes as the chart to guide my course—the model to direct my work—the support to uphold my weakness.

31. *I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.*

WHILE David complained of his "soul cleaving unto the dust,"² he was yet enabled to say—"I have stuck unto thy testimonies." And how exactly does this experience accord with the features of every real Christian's heart, (or two hearts, as a converted African once expressed it,) described in the Apostle's picture of himself—"I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."³ In the midst however of the most painful conflicts, the child of God holds fast his confidence. He feels that he hates the sin that he commits,

¹ Verse 11.

² Verse 25.

³ Rom. vii. 22, 23, 25. Most graphically is this conflict depicted in the interesting record which Augustine has given of the exercises of his own mind—"The new will which began to be in me, whereby I would love thee, O my God, the only certain sweetness, was not yet able to overcome my former will, confirmed by long continuance. So my two wills, the one old, the other new; the one carnal, the other spiritual, conflicted between themselves, and rent my soul by their disagreement. Then did I understand by my own experience what I had read, how the "flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh." I was myself on both sides, but more in that which I approved, than in that which I condemned, in myself, because for the most part I suffered reluctantly what I did willingly.' *Confess. Book viii. ch. 5.* Compare Rom. vii. 15—20.

and loves the Saviour, whom, in spite of himself, he dishonours; so that, with all his sins and unworthiness, he fears not to put in his claim among the family of God.

But, reader, seriously ask yourself—How did you become a Christian? Was it by birth and education, or by choice? If indeed by grace you have been enabled to “*choose the way of truth,*” then be sure you cleave to it, so that no business nor pleasure, nor difficulties, turn you away from it. Unless indeed you “*stick to*” your choice, better, far better, were it that you had not made it at all. “No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. It had been better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you.”¹ Yet praised be God for the security of perseverance! He that enabled you to “put your hand to the plough” will keep it there in the habitual exercise of faith firm and steadfast. “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth you.”²

Yet there must be a daily conflict maintained with the world, and what is more difficult, with self, if “with purpose of heart you would cleave unto the Lord.”³ You will often be tempted to turn aside. The length and weariness of the way,⁴ and the slowness of your progress, are sources of constant and harassing trial. It will be well, therefore, often to revert to the ground of your original choice. Was it made in the Lord—under his light, direction and encouragement? This reason may well bind you to “*stick to*” it; and the

¹ Luke ix. 62. John viii. 31. 2 Peter ii. 21.

³ Acts xi. 23.

² Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

⁴ Numb. xxi. 4.

more steadily you "hold fast your profession," the more you will be able to overcome opposing difficulties, and to assure your own heart, that *the way which you have chosen*, and to which "*you stick*," is a "way of pleasantness and peace."¹

Backslider! have you found God "a wilderness, or a land of darkness,"² that you could think of deserting him, and returning to the world for happiness? Is it wise to "forsake the fountain" for "broken cisterns?"³ Is it likely to make you happier in this world? And is it not certain (unless through abounding grace you are recovered) to bring you to perdition in the next? And have you forgotten who it was that befriended you in the moment of awful extremity, and snatched you as a brand from the burning? Have you forgotten the endearing proofs of his love, when he condescended to become a man—"a man of sorrows,"⁴ and to die in the agony of the cross, bearing for you the eternal curse of God!⁵ And does not gratitude remind you, what returns of faithful service are due from a creature so infinitely indebted to him as you have been? Surely the steadfast perseverance with which his heart clave to his costly work,⁶ may serve to put to shame the unsteadiness of your purpose in "*sticking to his testimonies*."

Believer! you are determined to abide by your choice. But let not your confidence be in your own strength. Remember him, who one hour declared that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him, and the next hour denied him with oaths and curses and learn to follow up your resolution with instant

¹ Prov. iii. 17.

² Jer. ii. 31.

³ Ib. ⁿ13.

⁴ Isaiah liii. 3.

⁵ Gal. iii. 13.

⁶ Compare Matt. xvi. 23. Luke xii. 50. Heb. xii. 2, 3.

⁷ Matt. xxvi. 55, 74.

prayer—"O Lord, put me not to shame." Leave me not to myself, lest I become a shame to myself, and an offence to thy church. "I will keep thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly."¹ Dependence upon the Lord, in a deep sense of our weakness, is the principle of perseverance. He will never shut out the prayer of his faithful servant. He hath promised "My people shall never be ashamed;"² and therefore, taking firm hold of his promise, you may "go on your way rejoicing."

32. *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

LET us look into our own experience for something responsive to this expression of the Christian's delight in the ways of God. If we "*have chosen the way of God's commandments,*" and have been able to "*stick unto*" this way, we shall wish to "*run in it*" with constancy, activity, and cheerfulness. We shall want to mend our pace. If we walk, we shall long to "*run.*" There is always the same reason for progress that there was for setting out. Necessity, advantage, enjoyment, spur us on to the end. Whether therefore we have made little or much progress, we shall desire to make more; we shall go on praying and walking, and praying that we may walk with a swifter motion: we shall be dissatisfied, yet not discouraged—"faint, yet pursuing."³ Now this is as it should be. This is after the pattern of the holy Apostle—"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling

¹ Verse 8.

² Joel ii. 27.

³ Judges viii. 4.

of God in Christ Jesus.”¹ But we must mark the secret as well as the pattern of Christian progress—looking beyond the Apostle, and the “so great cloud of witnesses with which we are encompassed”—and “looking unto Jesus.”² Faith is the principle of life, and supplies the daily motion of life, by directing our eye to him as “the Author,” until he “becomes the Finisher,” of our faith. This is at once our duty, our privilege, our happiness, and our strength. This is the point at which we begin to run. Hitherto the shackles of sin, self-righteousness, and unbelief, had hindered us: now we “so run, that we may obtain.”³

But in “*the way of God’s commandment*” how are we “sore let and hindered” by a straitened heart! And how often do we feel the heart, as it were, “shut up and it cannot get forth:”⁴ faith so low—desires so faint—hopes so narrow, that it seems impossible to make progress! Perhaps we “did run well,” and have been “hindered.”⁵ Perhaps the soul has been asleep in carelessness or self-indulgence; or unbelief in some of its varied forms has prevailed; and thus, while we “are not straitened” in God, we “are straitened in our own bowels.”⁶ If then the rich-fool thought of enlarging his barns, when his stores had increased upon him,⁷ much more should we be sending up the petition—“O that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast!”⁸ Whatever cause we have to cry out—“My leanness, my leanness,”⁹—still let us, in the exercise of faith and prayer, be waiting for a more cheerful ability to love, serve, and praise. Let us be restless, till the prison doors are again opened, and the command is issued to the prisoners—“Go forth: and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

² Heb. xii. 1, 2.

³ 1 Cor. ix. 24.

⁴ Psalm lxxxviii. 8.

⁵ Gal. v. 7.

⁶ 2 Cor. vi. 12.

⁷ Luke xii. 16—19.

⁸ 1 Chron. iv. 10.

⁹ Isa. xxiv. 16.

shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places." ¹ The blessed "*ways of God's commandments*" lie before us; and who knoweth but the Lord will once more shine upon us, once more unloose our fetters, and renew our strength?

Yet must every motion proceed from the Lord's touch upon the heart. However sincere be our resolution: without a spirit of dependence, we "shall faint and be weary, and utterly fall." "Draw me"—saith the Church—"we will run after thee." ² "*I will run*"—saith the believer—but how? "not in my own strength, but by the good hand of my God upon me," ³ enlivening and *enlarging my heart*. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." ⁴ Let me then begin betimes—make haste—keep straight on—fix my eye on the mark—"endure unto the end." I may yet expect the "oil of gladness" to make my chariot wheels move with ease, and in the joy of blessed surprise shall I exclaim—"Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." ⁵ Godly sorrow had made me serious. Now let holy joy make me active. "The joy of the Lord is my strength;" ⁶ and I am ready, under the power of constraining love, ⁷ to work, to toil, and to obey. I am ready to run without weariness, to "march onward" without fainting; ⁸ not measuring my pace by my own strength, but looking to him who "strengtheneth with all might by his Spirit in the inner man." ⁹

Happy fruit of wrestling prayer and diligent waiting on God! Joy in God, and strength to walk with him, ~~with~~ increasing knowledge of him, increasing communion with him, and increasing confidence in him.

¹ Isa. xlix. 9.

² Cant. i. 4.

³ Ezra vii. 9.

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 17.

⁵ Cant. vi. 12.

⁶ Neh. viii. 10.

⁷ 2 Cor. v. 14.

⁸ Isaiah xl. 31, "march onward."—Bishop Lowth's Version.

⁹ Eph. iii. 16.

PART V.

33. *Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end.*

How infinitely great is the privilege of this heavenly teaching! “Lord, to whom shall we go?”¹ “Who teacheth like thee?”² Who can effectually teach beside thee? Have we not found in coming to thee, that the invincible unteachableness of the dullest heart has been overcome, sight given to the blind, and understanding to the simple. We know nothing—absolutely nothing, except as we are taught of God. The blind man needs to be led in the plainest and most direct, as well as in the more difficult and rugged paths. And thus do we need the shining of light from above—not only in “the deep things of God”—but for the reception of the simplest and most elementary truths. And yet we want not this knowledge for its own sake—merely for a barren, extensive apprehension—but for its practical influence. For of what avail is the discovery even of important truth, if we be not moulded into the likeness of it—if we do not feel its power, enlightening, persuading, constraining the soul unto “the obedience of faith?” Perhaps it may be considered one of the most striking proofs of the seal of God stamped upon *the statutes* of Scripture, that there is no thought of our heart connected with Christian practice, that is not in this holy book directed to its proper end. How often do we see the most clear instructions for the regulation of our conduct,

¹ John vi. 68.

² Job xxxvi. 22.

flow from single sentences or expressions in these "*statutes*;" evidently proving an infinite wisdom in their distribution, a reference in the eternal mind to every detail of practical duty, and a Divine power and unction, applying the word to the several circumstances of daily conduct! For, indeed, what mind but the mind of God could have comprehended in so small a compass such a vast system of instruction? In this view, therefore, supplication for the Lord's teaching becomes the spring of our obedient walk. For how can we "*keep*" a way which we do not understand? And who was ever "*taught the way of the Lord's statutes*," who had not his heart constrained and directed by their spiritual beauty and sweetness? Our walk in this path realizes a happy evidence of union with the Saviour,¹ "the love of God is perfected in us;"² and our confidence is established before God.³

The object nearest to the believer's heart, and which causes him many an anxious, and too often—many an unbelieving thought—is the grace of perseverance. Now the Lord's *teaching* is the principle of perseverance. It is "*the light of life*"⁴—enlightening and quickening—while shining into the mind, acting upon the heart. Under this influence therefore we live—we endure—we cannot fail of *keeping the way unto the end*. And in this crowning blessing of perseverance connected with the Lord's teaching⁵ is sealed to us the hope of victory over our spiritual enemies, and the participation of our Saviour's glory.⁶ Confidence indeed without prayer and dependence upon our glorious Head is most daring presumption; but that "well-ordered and sure covenant," which "is all our salvation, and all our desire," engages for our

¹ 1 John iii. 24.

² Ib. ii. 5.

³ Ib. iii. 22.

⁴ Ib. i. 5.

⁵ Ib. ii. 27.

⁶ Rev. ii. 26—28.

continuance in “*the way of the Lord’s statutes!*”—“*I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*”¹

34. *Give me understanding, and I will keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

‘HE that is his own teacher’—says Bernard—and one greater than Bernard,² ‘has a fool for his master.’ Man cannot teach what he does not know; and of God and of his law he knows nothing. Therefore the beginning of wisdom is a consciousness of ignorance, a distrust of our own understanding, and the heart-felt prayer—“*Give me understanding.*” The spiritual *understanding* is the gift of Jesus Christ.³ He directs us to himself as the fountain from whence it flows—“*I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*”⁴ And this *understanding* differs from mere intellectual discernment or speculative knowledge, as being an influential principle, and the spring of spiritual activity in our walk with God⁵ so that our obedience is not merely outward and reluctant, but the exercise of filial delight and wholeness of heart—not only looking to *keep the law of God to the end*, during our whole life; but every day of our life “*with our whole heart.*” Now, are we still restless and persevering in seeking more love to God, and greater alacrity in his service? Do we long to engage our hearts with

¹ Jer. xxxii. 40; xxxi. 33, with 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

² Prov. xxviii. 26.

³ 1 John ii. 20; v. 20.

⁴ John viii. 2; also xii. 46.

⁵ See Col. i. 9, 10.

more entire devotedness to the work of obedience? Then will this prayer be a suitable expression of our need, and the utterance of a humble, resolute petitioner. It is not however enough that we have once received, unless we are constantly receiving. We must ask, that we may receive; but after we have received we must ask again. Yet such a prayer as this is never offered up, until the soul has in part received what it is here seeking for. The natural man is "wise in his own conceit," and has therefore no idea of his need of Divine teaching.

But even a clear apprehension of the doctrines of the Bible, and of the "truth as it is in Jesus," will not satisfy the real believer. "*Give me understanding*"—is still the prayer of the most advanced proficient in the ways of God—"not only that I may believe these doctrines; but that I may adorn them." And in every occasion of need, in every path of duty, this cry is repeated, with an importunity that is never wearisome to the ears of our gracious Father. And in how many unnoticed instances has the answer been vouchsafed, when some clear and heavenly ray, darting unexpectedly into the mind, or some providential concurrence of unforeseen circumstances, has disentangled a path before intricate and involved, and marked it before us with the light of a sunbeam! How many whispers of conscience! how many reasonable suggestions in moments of darkness and perplexity may the observant child of God record, as the answer to this needful prayer; "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."¹ Nor will our growth in spiritual *understanding* fail to

¹ Psalm cvii. 43.

evidence itself in the steady consistency of a well-ordered conversation—"Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom."¹ If then knowledge is valuable according to its usefulness, one ray of this practical knowledge of the ways of God—the result of prayer for heavenly teaching—is more to be prized than the highest attainments of speculative religion—flowing from mere human instruction.

35. *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments ;
for therein do I delight.*

WE are equally ignorant of *the path of God's commandments*, and impotent to *go in it*. Yet when *understanding has been given* to discern the beauty of it, the soul's warmest desire is fixed upon it—Conscious helplessness looks upward—*Make me to go* : and he who said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house," speaks the same word of quickening life and power to the soul, "*giving heed*," "expecting to receive something of him."² It is delightful to acknowledge of this work, that "All is of God"—that "it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure."³ To him only can it belong. For since the natural inclination "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ;"⁴ some new bias, some constraining principle, some act of Almighty power, must be introduced—"Turn thou me, and I shall be turned"⁵—" *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments.*"

¹ James iii. 13.

² Matt. ix. 6, with Acts iii. 4, 5.

³ 2 Cor. v. 18. Phil. ii. 13. ⁴ Rom. viii. 7. ⁵ Jer. xxxi. 18.

But if our spiritual acquaintance with *this path* has given us any *delight* in it, still we want accelerated motion to run with increasing alacrity. We want to take “the Lord God for our strength; and he shall make our feet like hind’s feet, and shall *make us to walk* upon our high places.”¹ *The path*, indeed, when seen with the eye of sense, will appear uninviting. This distorted vision brings all its difficulties into full view, while all its counterbalancing enjoyments are hid. Let us however exercise that “faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”² Let us exhibit our proper character, “walking by faith, and not by sight;”³ and our discernment of unseen things will be more clear, and our enjoyment of them more permanent. The prayer will then be with increasing earnestness of desire—“*Make me to go in the path of thy commandments.*”

But we must not be content with walking in this way; we must seek to “*delight in it.*” Delight is the marrow of religion. “God loveth a cheerful giver,”⁴ and accepts obedience, only when it is given, not when it is *forced*. He loves the service of that man, who considers it his highest privilege and pleasure to render it, and whose heart rejoices in the way. “as a giant to run his race.”⁵ Fervent prayer and cheerful obedience, mark the experience of the thriving Christian. As a true “child of Zion, he is joyful in his King;”⁶ he loves his service, and counts it “perfect freedom”—the dominion of love, mercy, and grace.

Perhaps however the self-condemned penitent is distressed by this description of a child of God. He

¹ Hab. iii. 19.

² Heb. xi. 1.

³ 2 Cor. v. 7.

⁴ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

⁵ Psalm xix. 5.

⁶ Psalm cxlix. 2.

thinks he cannot find the same marks in himself; and he too hastily concludes, that he does not belong to the heavenly family; not considering, that his very grief is caused by his love to, and "*delight in,*" that way in which he is so hindered, and in which he daily prays—" *Make me to go.*" It was probably the same sense of weakness and inability "*to go in the path of God's commandments,*" which urged David's prayer; and if it urges yours, poor trembling penitent; if it sends you to a throne of grace, you will, ere long, receive an answer of peace, and "*go on your way rejoicing.*"

But whoever of us can say of this path—" *therein do I delight*"—is not only following the "man after God's own heart," but bears the image of David's Lord, and our fore-runner in this path. He could testify to his Father—"I delight to do thy will, O my God:"¹ and to his disciples "I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work:"² and as a proof of the intenseness of his delight, he could to their great amazement, "*go before them*"³ to Jerusalem, unappalled by the "*baptism*"⁴ of blood which awaited him; yea, even "*straitened*" with the unquenchable ardour of his love, until it was accomplished.

36. *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to coveteousness.*

BUT what is this power of God necessary to "*make us to go in the path of his commandments?*" It is the force of Almighty love, by which he bows and

¹ Psalm xl. 8, with Heb. x. 7.

² Mark x. 32.

³ John iv. 32, 34.

⁴ Luke xii. 50.

bends the will, as with a Divine touch; and thus effectually *inclines*, and draws us to himself. "The day of his power, in which he makes us willing,"¹ is a time of love.² "I drew them"—saith he—"with cords of a man, and with bands of love."³ Every man who is conscious of the natural indisposition and counteracting bias of the heart, will deeply feel his need of this prayer—"Incline my heart." The native principle of man draws him to his own self—to his own indulgence—pleasure—*covetousness*. This is the active principle within, that opposes the workings of the renewed man, assuming a thousand shapes and forms of gratifying self, at the expense of love to God. Few but are ready to decry and condemn it in others, while perhaps it may be their own cleaving and besetting sin. When the mind is grasping after the world, as if it were our portion, we have the greatest reason to "take heed" to our Lord's admonition, and "beware of covetousness."⁴ When we invest earthly gratifications with any inherent excellency, we put them in the place of God, and (for the time at least) are under the influence of "*covetousness*." Whenever therefore we feel an undue balance to our own interest or indulgences; then will be a season for special supplication—*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness*.

But the question is of primary moment. Has any advance been made in the subjugation of this baneful inclination? Are we willing to part with our substance at the Lord's will?—not only with our superfluities, or the refuse of what we possess, but with that which seems to be necessary to us? Do we desire to sit loose to our earthly comforts? Are we enabled to

¹ Psalm cx. 3.

³ Hosca xi. 4.

² Ezek. xvi. 8.

⁴ Luke xii. 15.

check our natural discontent with the Lord's dealings with us, and our eagerness to "seek great things for ourselves," when he hath said—"Seek them not?"¹ What the world calls a generous and noble spirit is often a cloak for this selfish principle, which will part with much, if but the darling object—the idol—be retained. There is probably no propensity more opposed to the influence of the gospel, or which more cripples the soul in "*going in the path of God's commandments.*" How much of the good seed of the kingdom, that was springing up with the promise of a plentiful harvest, has this weed of rank luxuriance "choked, that it has become unfruitful!"² Our Lord's parables therefore³—his precepts⁴—his terms of discipleship⁵—his own example of poverty and renunciation of this world's comforts⁶—all are directed to detect the working, and even to forbid the existence of "*covetousness.*" The power of the love of Christ delivered Matthew⁷ and Zaccheus⁸ from this destructive principle, and "*inclined their hearts to the testimonies of God.*" And has not faith still the same power to turn the heart from the world, from sin, from self to Christ? Oh! let it be exercised in daily contemplation of Him, and a continual access to God by Him. Then shall we learn to rest upon the promise of his love,⁹ and to delight in his testimonies! Earthly cares will be cast upon him, and earthly prospects will lose their splendour.¹⁰ This life of

¹ Jeremiah xlv. 5.

² Mark iv. 19.—The example of the rich young man, Matt. xix. 21, 22. Ananias and Sapphira, Acts v. 1, 2. Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10.

³ Luke xii. 16—21; xvi. 14, 19, &c. ⁴ Matt. vi. 25—33.

⁵ Matt. xvi. 24; xix. 27—29. Luke xiv. 33. ⁶ Matt. viii. 20.

⁷ Ib. ix. 9. ⁸ Luke xix. 1—10. ⁹ Heb. xiji. 5.

¹⁰ Luke xii. 15. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"—illustrated by the parable, verses 16—21.

faith—living in union with a heavenly Saviour, involves the only effective principle of resistance. Those who are risen with Christ will be temperate in earthly things, “setting their affections on things above.” Such—such alone—will “mortify the members that are upon the earth, evil concupiscence, and *covetousness, which is idolatry.*”¹

But let us not forget, that the desire, the inclination, the principle of “*covetousness*” even if it is not brought into active and perceptible motion, is fatally destructive of the life of religion. “They that *will be rich*”² fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Awful warning to professors!—“The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”³ A most important exhortation to the people of God!—“but thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness.”⁴ If the Lord loves you, he will not indeed lose you; but unless you “take heed, and beware of covetousness,” he will not spare you. In the midst therefore, of temptation without, and a world of sin within, go on your pilgrimage to heaven, with this prayer indelibly fixed on your heart—“*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*”

¹ Col. iii. 1—5.

² Οἱ Βουλόμενοι πλουτεῖν. 1 Tim. vi. 9.—The very desire or inclination to be rich bears the stamp of a heart seeking to divide its services between God and Mammon, and therefore unfaithful to him, who by just right claims the supreme undisputed whole—“My son, give me thine heart.”

³ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

⁴ Ib. 11.

37. *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity: and quicken thou me in thy way.*

HERE we have the man of God deprecating another temptation to self-indulgence, and praying to be kept at the greatest possible distance from it. That his *heart* may not be *inclined to it*; he desires that *his eyes may be turned away from beholding it*. And indeed it is only in this tender spirit of watchfulness and prayer that the heart can be kept—much less *quicken in the way of God*. Naturally inclined to evil, and hankering after forbidden paths, a thousand vanities steal it away in a moment, and every object around furnishes fuel for temptation. “*Vanity is sin, because it is not of the Father, but of the world;*”¹ and it includes “*all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*” Detail is unnecessary in reckoning all the sum of *vanity*, or in enlarging on any particular items. The preacher, the son of David, has done it for us; standing on the vantage ground, and taking within his view the furthest horizon of earthly excellency, he pronounces his judgment—“*Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities! all is vanity.*”² We have just mentioned the blast upon *many a promising profession* by the “*choking lusts of other things;*” and that *many a sincere profession* has been exposed to hurt by the same deadly influence, is evident from our Lord’s solemn caution to his own disciples—“*Take heed to yourselves*” lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life; and so that

¹ 1 John ii. 16.

² Eccl. i. 2; also ii. 1—12.

day come upon you unawares.”¹ Some indeed seem to walk, as if they were proof against temptation. They venture to the very edge of the precipice, under a vain assurance that no danger is to be apprehended. But such a confidence is upon the brink of a grievous fall.² The tender-hearted child of God, like David, while he trusts in the promise, that “Sin shall not have dominion over him,”³ knows that he can only enjoy the security of it, while he is shrinking from every thing that is likely to hurt and endanger him. He “hates even the garment spotted by the flesh;”⁴ and, remembering how often his outward senses have ministered to the workings of his weak and treacherous heart,⁵ he prays with fervency and with perseverance—“*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.*”

Probably the recollection of the circumstance of his own sin,⁶ would to the end of his life remind David of his special need of this prayer. Yet who that is conscious of his own weakness and corruption, will find the prayer unsuitable to his circumstances of daily temptation? But we must watch as well as pray. For as watchfulness without prayer is presumption, so prayer without watchfulness is self-delusion. To pray that “*our eyes*” may be “*turned from vanity,*” without “*making a covenant with our eyes,*”⁷ that they should not *behold* it, is like “*taking fire in our bosoms,*” and expecting “*not to be burnt,*”⁸ because we have prayed that we might not be burnt. If we desire not to be “*led into temptation,*” we must “*watch that we enter not into it.*”⁹ The sincerity of our prayer—“*Lead us not into temptation,*”—will be proved by the watchfulness of our

¹ Luke xxi. 34.

² Prov. xvi. 18.

³ Rom. vi. 14.

⁴ Jude 23.

⁵ See Numb. xv. 39. Josh. vii. 21.

⁶ 2 Sam. xi. 2.

⁷ Job xxxi. 1.

⁸ Prov. vi. 27, 28.

⁹ Compare Matthew vi. 13, with xxvi. 41.

conduct in avoiding the circumstances and occasions of temptation. So also the fear of sin will manifest itself by a fear of temptation to sin. "The knife will be put to the throat, if we be given to appetite."¹ We shall be afraid of the wine sparkling in the glass.² To the question—Where is the harm of *beholding vanity*, if we do not follow it?—we would only reply,—Who has not found the eye an inlet to sin? When Eve beheld the forbidden fruit, perhaps she did not think of taking it: and when she took it, she did not think of eating it: but the beginning of sin "is as the letting out of water," whose progress once opened, may beat down all before it.³ When Bunyan's pilgrims were obliged to pass through Vanity Fair, assailed by temptations and allurements on every side, they stopped their eyes and ears, and, quickening their pace, cried — "*Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.*" A striking reproof to us, who too often loiter and gaze, until we begin to covet those vanities, to which, as Christians, we "are dead."⁴

It is asked—What will most effectually "*turn my eyes from vanity?*" Not the seclusion of contemplative retirement—not the relinquishment of our lawful connexion with the world; but the transcendent beauty of Jesus unveiled to our eyes, and fixing our hearts. This alone is effectual, and this will "*turn our eyes from vanity*" in the midst of its most glittering forms! The sight of the "pearl of great price"⁵ dims the lustre of the "goodliest pearls" of earth. This will operate both in the way of preventing grace to keep us from evil, and of quickening

¹ Prov. xxiii. 2.

³ Gen. iii. 6, with Prov. xvii. 14.

⁵ Matt. xiii. 46.

² Verses 31, 32.

⁴ See Col. iii. 2, 3.

grace to urge us forward in a steady, active, habitual progress. A single eye fixed on a single object, moves us forward without turning to the right hand or to the left. “*This one thing I do—forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before; I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”¹ This spirit of Christian simplicity and diligence leaves no wish of the heart for *beholding vanity*. The world, with all its flowery paths, is a dreary wilderness, and Christ and heaven are the only objects of desire—“He that shutteth his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure. *Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.*”²—Precious promises to those that flee from temptation, and desire to walk in the ways of God!

38. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.*

If “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”³—a “treasure”⁴—a “strong confidence”⁵ and “a fountain of life;”⁶ how wise—how rich—how safe—how happy—is he that “*is devoted to*” it! “Blessed” indeed is he “with every spiritual blessing”—with the favour of his God,⁷ the secret manifestations of his love,⁸ the teaching of his grace,⁹ and the mercy of his covenant.¹⁰ It would seem that the promises of God in the Old Testament are very

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

⁴ Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

⁷ Ps. xxxiii. 18.

¹⁰ Ib. ciii. 17.

² Isa. xxxiii. 15—17.

⁵ Prov. xiv. 26.

⁸ Ps. xxv. 14.

³ Ps. cxi. 10.

⁶ Prov. v. 27.

⁹ Ib. 12.

generally connected with the fear of God, as in the New Testament, they are linked with faith. But in truth, so identified are these two principles in their operation, that the faith, by which we apprehend the forgiveness of God, and the privileges of his kingdom, never fails to issue in a godly, reverential, filial fear.¹ To be devoted to this fear, completes the character of a servant of God—the highest honour in the universe,—implying the substantial joy of heaven itself.² It is an obedience of choice, of reverence, and of love. “He joins himself to the Lord to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord,—to be his servant.”³ ‘Yes, gracious Lord, I had rather be bound than loosed.’ I only wished to be loosed from the bonds of sin, that I might be bound to thy service for ever. My heart is treacherous, and I care not what bonds are laid on me. “O Lord, truly I am thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds;”⁴ I am “devoted to thy fear.” Is this my desire, my mind, my determination, my character? Then let me come and plead my title to an interest in the promises of the word—rich and free, “exceeding great and precious”⁵—all mine—“yea and amen in Christ Jesus;”⁶ let me plead at the throne of grace, that every word may be “established” in my victory over sin, advancing knowledge of Christ, experience of his love, conformity to his image, and finally, in my preservation in him unto eternal life.

But I must inquire, how far has the fear of God operated with me as a safeguard from sin,⁷ and an habitual rule of conduct?⁸ I observe, that David’s

¹ Psalm cxxx. 4. Compare Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9. Hosea iii. 5, also Heb. xii. 28.

² Rev. vii. 15; xxii. 3.

³ Isa. lvi. 6.

⁴ Ps. cxvi. 16.

⁵ 2 Pet. i. 4.

⁶ 2 Cor. i. 20.

⁷ Gen. xxxix. 9.

Neh. v. 15. Prov. xvi. 6.

⁸ Prov. xxiii. 17.

confidence in the promises of God, far from lessening his jealousy over himself, only made him more "*devoted to the fear*" of God. And if my assurance be well-grounded, it will be ever accompanied with holy fear; so that my progress may be known by my "standing more in awe of God's word;"¹ having a more steady abhorrence of sin, and a dread of "grieving the Holy Spirit of God." Thus this filial fear produces a holy confidence; while confidence serves to strengthen fear; and their mutual influence quickens our devotedness to the work of the Lord.

It is interesting to remark, that the Christian privilege of assurance is not confined to the New Testament dispensation. In David's pleading to have the "*word of his God stablished unto him,*"² he settles himself upon the tried grounds of faith. And this direct act of faith, as it regards God in Christ, his engagements, and his promises, cannot be too confident. The promises are made to the whole church, that we might each look for our part and interest in them. God loves to have his own seal and pledge brought before him. "Put me in remembrance"—saith he; "let us plead together." "He cannot deny himself."³ This is the exercise and the power of faith. I bring my wants. I bring *thy word* of promise. *Stablish thy word unto thy servant.* Thou hast bought me with a precious price: thou hast made me thine: thou hast subdued my heart to thyself, so that it is now "*devoted to thy fear.*" Whatsoever, therefore, thy covenant has provided for my sanctification, my humiliation, my chastisement, my present and everlasting

¹ Verse 161.

² Mark this petition drawn out by David into a full pleading with his God, 2 Sam. vii. 25, 28, 29. The expression also of the same confidence will afterwards be noticed. Verse 49.

³ Isaiah xliii. 26. 2 Tim. ii. 13.

consolation—“*Stablish this word :*” let it be fulfilled in me ; for I am “*thy servant, devoted to thy fear.*”

39. *Turn away my reproach which I fear ; for thy judgments are good.*

THERE is a *reproach*, that we have no cause to *fear*, but rather to glory in ; that which is stamped by our Lord as one of the chief privileges of his Gospel,¹ and which his faithful people have ever borne as the badge of their profession.² But it was the “*reproach*” of bringing dishonour upon the name of his God, that David *feared*,³ and deprecated with most anxious importunate prayer. What Christian is there, who does not feel the *fear* of this *reproach*, as exciting him to tender watchfulness and circumspection of conduct, and habitual dependence upon an Almighty upholding power. “Hold thou me up and I shall be safe”⁴—will be the constant supplication of one that fears the Lord, and fears himself. Professors of religion do not perhaps sufficiently consider the active malice of the enemies of the gospel “watching for their halting ;”⁵ else would they be more careful to remove all occasions of “*reproach*” on account of inconsistency of temper or conversation. None therefore that feel their own weakness, the continual apprehension of danger, the tendency of their heart to backslide

¹ Matt. v. 10—12. Compare Phil. i. 29.

² Acts v. 41 ; xxiv. 5 ; xxviii. 22. Hebrews xiii. 13. 1 Peter iv. 12—16.

³ 2 Sam. xii. 14. We find Saul strongly deprecating this *reproach*—“I have sinned ; *yet honour me now*, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel.” (1 Sam. xv. 30.) But how different the principle in these two instances under a similar trial ! The one tremblingly alive, that the name of God might not be reproached through his shameful fall. The other earnest only to secure his own reputation.

⁴ Verse 117.

⁵ Jer. xx. 10.

from God, and to disgrace "that worthy name by which they are called,"¹ will think this prayer unseasonable or unnecessary—"Turn away my reproach which I fear."

Perhaps also the conflicting Christian may find this a suitable prayer. Sometimes Satan has succeeded in beguiling a child of God—he has drawn him into some worldly compliance, or weakened his confidence, by tempting him to look to himself for some warrant of acceptance, (in all which suggestions he is aided and abetted by his treacherous heart :) and then will this "accuser of the brethren" turn back upon him, and change himself into "an angel of light," presenting before him a black catalogue of those very falls, into which he had successfully led him: Bunyan does not fail to enumerate these "*reproaches*" as amongst the most harassing assaults of Apollyon. In his desperate conflict with Christian, he taunts him with his fall into the Slough of Despond, and every successive deviation from his path, as blotting out his warrant of present favour with the king, and blasting all hopes of reaching the celestial city. Christian is neither able nor willing to conceal or palliate the charge. He knows it is all true, and much more besides; but he knows this is true also—"Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded." "The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin."² Believers! In the heat of your conflict remember the direction—the only direction that meets your case, and provides for your help—"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."³ Do you not hate the sins, with which you have been overtaken?

¹ James ii. 7.² Rom. v. 20. 1 John i. 7.³ Eph. vi. 16.

Are you not earnestly longing for deliverance from their power? Then, even while the recollections of their guilt and defilement humble you before the Lord, you have only to take fresh hold of the gospel, and you shall “overcome by the blood of the Lamb.”¹ Victory must come from the cross. And the soul that is directing its eye thither for pardon, strength, and consolation, may sigh out the prayer with acceptance—“*Turn away my reproach which I fear.*”

But how deeply is the guilt of apostasy or backsliding aggravated by the acknowledgment, that all are constrained to make—“*Thy judgments are good!*” How affecting is the Lord’s expostulation with us!—“What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense.”² No, surely we have nothing to complain of our Master, of his work, or of his wages; but much, very much, to complain of ourselves, of our watchfulness, neglect, backsliding, and to humble ourselves on account of the consequent *reproach* upon our profession.

* Never however let us cease to cry, that all *the reproach which we fear* on account of our allowed inconsistencies of profession, may for the Church’s sake, be “*turned away from us.*” Meanwhile, “let us accept it as the punishment of our iniquity;”³ and in the recollection of the “*goodness of the Lord’s judgments,*” still venture to hope and look for the best things to come out of it, from our gracious Lord.

¹ Rev. xii. 9—11.

² Jer. ii. 5. Micah vi. 3. Isaiah xliii. 23.

³ Lev. xxvi. 41.

40. *Behold, I have longed after thy precepts : quicken me in thy righteousness.*

THE Psalmist's heartfelt acknowledgment of the *goodness of the Lord's judgments* naturally leads him to *long after them*.¹ This longing is the mark of a child of God. The professor *longs after* the promises, and too often builds a delusive—because an unsanctifying—hope upon them. The believer feels it to be his privilege and safety to have an equal regard to both—to obey *the precepts of God* in dependence on his promises, and to expect the accomplishment of the promises, in the way of obedience to *the precepts*. The utmost extent of the service is the heavy yoke of *outward conformity*. He knows nothing of an *inward delight*, and “*longing after them*.” Of many of them his heart complains—“This is a hard saying : who can hear it ?”² The Christian can give a good reason for his delight even in the most difficult and painful “*precepts*.” The moments of deepest repentance are his times of the sweetest “refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”³ Whatever pleasure the indulgence of a sinful inclination may give, far greater is the ultimate enjoyment arising out of the mortification of it.⁴ That *precept* of our Saviour, inculcating self-denial, and the *daily* taking up the cross, in following him⁵—involves the highest advantage. It is

¹ Compare the same acknowledgment, Rom. vii. 12, connected with similar delight, 22.

² John vi. 60.

³ Acts iii. 19. Luther says the practice of repentance was ever sweeter to him, after hearing the expression of an old divine—“That is kind repentance, which begins from the love of God.”

⁴ See David's lively expression of gratitude—first to his God—then to the instrument employed by him (Abigail) in restraining him from the gratification of most unjustifiable revenge.—1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

⁵ Luke ix. 23.

the wholesome discipline, by which we lose our own perverse will ; the power of sin is restrained, the pride of the heart humbled ; and our real happiness fixed upon a solid and permanent basis. So that, whatever dispensation some might desire for breaking the *precept* without forfeiting the promise, the Christian blesses God for the strictness, that binds him to a steady obedience to his will. To him it is grievous, not to keep it, but to break it. A "*longing*" therefore "*after the precepts,*" marks the character of a child of God ; and may be considered as the pulse, by which the health—if not the life—of the soul may be ascertained.

There are indeed times, when the violence of temptation, or the paralyzing effect of indolence, hide the movements of the "hidden man of the heart." And yet, even in these gloomy hours, when the mouth is shut, and the heart dumb, before God—"so troubled that it cannot speak"¹—even then acceptable incense is ascending before the throne of God. We have a powerful intercessor "helping our infirmities"—interpreting our desires, and crying from within, "with groanings that cannot be uttered ;"² yet such as, being indited by our advocate within, and presented by our Advocate above,³ are most consoling earnestnesses of their fulfilment. "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him : he also will hear their cry, and will save them."⁴

But the most fervent *longings* of a "child are so disproportioned to their grand object, that they must ever be accompanied with more earnest supplications for quickening grace. Idle confessions and heartless complainings become not his character, and bring no supply for his need. Let him bewail his own compa-

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 4.

² Rom. viii. 26.

³ Heb. ix. 24. Rev. viii. 3, 4.

⁴ Psalm cxlv. 19.

rative deadness, and besiege the mercy-seat with incessant importunity.¹ “*Quicken me in thy righteousness.*” “I plead thy righteousness—thy righteous promise for the reviving of my spiritual life. I long for more lively apprehensions of thy spotless righteousness. Oh! let it invigorate my delight, my obedience, my secret communion, my Christian walk and conversation.” Such *longings* poured out before the Lord for a fresh supply of quickening grace, are far different from “the desire of the slothful, which killeth him,”² and will not be forgotten before God. “Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”³ O for a more enlarged expectation, and for a more abundant vouchsafement of blessing!

But it may be asked—What weariness in, and reluctance to, duties is consistent with the principle and exercise of grace? Where it is only in the members, not in the mind—where it is only partial, not prevalent—where it is only occasional, not habitual—where it is lamented and resisted, and not allowed—and where in spite of its influence the Christian still holds on the way of duty—“grace reigns” in the midst of conflict, and will ultimately and gloriously triumph over all hindrance and opposition. But in the midst of the humbling views of sin that present themselves on every side, let me diligently inquire—Have I an habitual “hungering and thirsting after righteousness?” And since, at the best, I do but get my longings increased, and not satisfied; let heaven be much in my heart, where alone I shall be fully satisfied—“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”⁴

¹ Matthew xi. 12.

³ Psalm xxxvii. 4.

² Prov. xxi. 25.

⁴ Psalm xvii. 15.

PART VI.

41. *Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord; even thy salvation, according to thy word.*

A PRAYER at all times suitable for a sinner, who needs mercy every moment, and has been taught to look for it only in the Lord's *salvation*. Out of Christ we know only a God of justice and holiness. In Christ we behold "a just God, and yet a Saviour;"¹ and in "his *salvation*, which is nigh them that fear him, mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."² Therefore, general notions of the mercy of God without a distinct apprehension of his "*salvation*," can never be a warrant of faith to a sinner; and can only have their origin in presumption, such as God abhors. Can there be any communication of mercy from an unknown God? Can there be any intercourse with an angry God? "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee"³—"The Lord's mercies, even his *salvation*."

This prayer, however, is peculiarly suitable to the believer, longing to realize that which sometimes "through manifold temptations" is clouded to his view—his personal and individual interest in the *Lord's salvation*. It is not a distant or general apprehension that he needs—*Let thy mercies* not only be known—or reported—*Let them be applied—Let them come*, so that I can say—"This is mine—and rejoice in it." I

¹ Isaiah xlv. 21.

² Psalm lxxxv. 9, 10. Comp. Rom. iii. 26.

³ Job xxii. 21.

see *thy salvation* come to others. Who needs it more than I? *Let it come also unto me*—I would not be satisfied with description, however accurate. *Let it come to me. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me*, as thou usest to do to those that love thy name. “*Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest to thy people; O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the felicity of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.*”¹

Now, are we seeking the assurance of this *salvation* in prayer? Are we waiting to realize the present power of it, saving us from sin—Satan—the world—ourselves—and “blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus?” Should a trial of faith and patience be ordained for us, yet in the end we shall doubtless find, that God by these dispensations with us has been secretly storing us with experience, which will be a rich treasury to us throughout our pilgrimage. That he has kept us from turning our backs upon his ways, when we had no comfort in them, that he has upheld us with secret supplies of strength—what is this, but the working of his own Spirit within, and the pledge that the work shall advance to perfection? That he has enabled us, against all discouragements, to “continue instant in prayer,” is surely an answer to that prayer, which in our apprehensions of it had been cast out. That in the exercise of waiting upon him, we have been restless in the possession of worldly consolation, is an assurance, that the Lord himself will be our soul-satisfying and eternal portion. And who is there now in the sensible enjoyment of his love, who does not bless that divine wisdom, which took the same course with them, that has been taken with us to

¹ Verse 132. Psalm cvi. 4, 5.

bring them to these joys? When did a weeping seed-time fail of bringing a joyful harvest! ¹

But let not the word of promise be forgotten—“*According to thy word,*”—that it shall come fully—freely—eternally—to him that waiteth for it. “Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness: those that remember thee in thy ways.” ² The same desire of earnestness and faith will again come before us—“*My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.*” ³ Many indeed are satisfied with attainments far too low in spiritual enjoyments. It is comfortless to live at a distance from our Father’s house, when we might be dwelling in the secret of his presence, and rejoicing in the smiles of his love.

But sometimes, alas! days, weeks, and even months, pass by without any heart-searching inquiries as to the reasons of this deprivation. Let us not charge this dull and dishonourable state of mind upon the sovereignty of the Divine dispensations. Let us rather trace it to its true source—want of desire—want of faith—want of prayer—want of diligence. Let us be excited to a sense of our need of heavenly influence. Let us be encouraged by the recollection that earnest prayer will bring a sure answer; if not in the immediate fulfilment of our desires, at least in their enlargement. And how can our desires be too large after “*the mercies of God’s salvation?*”

42. *So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me; for I trust in thy word.*

WHAT is the *salvation* which he had just been speaking of? The whole gift of the mercy of God—redemption from sin, death, and hell—pardon, peace,

¹ Psalm cxxvi. 5, 6.

² Isaiah lxiv. 5.

³ Verse 81.

and acceptance with a reconciled God—constant communication of spiritual blessings—all that God can give or we can want—all that we are able to receive here, or heaven can perfect hereafter. Now if this “*comes to us*”—comes to our hearts—surely it will furnish us at all times with “*an answer to him that reproacheth us.*” The world cast upon us the reproach of the cross—“What profit is there to walk mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?”¹ What is there to counterbalance the relinquishment of pleasure, esteem, and worldly comfort? The professor can give no answer. He has heard of the Lord’s salvation. But he has no apprehensions of it. It has never *come to him*. The believer is ready with his *answer*—“I have found in the *Lord’s salvation* pardon and peace—“not as the world giveth”—and such as the world cannot take away. Here therefore do I abide—finding it *my happiness* not to live without the cross—and testifying in the midst of abounding tribulation that there are no comforts like Christ’s comfort.” This was David’s *answer*, when family trials were probably an occasion of *reproach*. “*Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation and all my desire.*”²

But there is a far heavier *reproach* than that of the world—when the grand accuser injects hard thoughts of God—when he throws our guilt and unworthiness—our helplessness and difficulties in our face. And how severe is this exercise in a season of spiritual desertion! Except the believer can stay his soul upon “a God that hideth himself as the God of Israel the Saviour,”³ he is unprepared with an *answer to him that reproacheth him*. Such appears to have been Job’s

¹ Mal. iii. 14.² 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.³ Isaiah xlv. 15.

condition,¹ and Heman's,² not to speak of many of the Lord's most favoured people, at different stages of their Christian life. Most important therefore is it for us to pray for a realizing sense of *the Lord's mercies—even of his salvation*—not only as necessary for our peace and comfort—but to garrison us against every assault, and to enable us to throw down the challenge—“*Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.*”³ Free grace has saved me—an unspotted righteousness covers me—an Almighty arm sustains me—eternal glory awaits me. “Who shall condemn? Who shall separate from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”⁴

Now for this bold front to our enemies, there is nothing wanted beyond the reach of the weakest child of God. No extraordinary holiness—no Christian establishment in experience is needed—nothing but simple, humble faith—“*For I trust in thy word.*” Faith make this salvation ours, in all its fulness and almighty power; and therefore our confidence “*in the word*” will make us “ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear.”⁵ “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.”⁶

Oh! do we not often fail in Christian boldness by the weakness of our apprehensions of *the salvation of God*? Clear and full evangelical views are indispensable to the enlivening exercises of our weighty

¹ Job vi. vii. ix.

² Psalm lxxxviii.

³ Micah vii. 8.

⁴ Rom. viii. 33—39.

⁵ 1 Peter iii. 15.

⁶ Isaiah liv. 17.

obligations. Any indistinctness here, from its necessary mixture of self-righteousness and unbelief, obscures the warrant of our personal interest, and therefore hinders that firm grasp of the promise which realizes the needful supplies of Divine strength. Much cause therefore have we to pray for a spiritual perception of the gospel in its freeness and fulness, as well as in its holy and heavenly enjoyments. Much need have we to use our speedy diligence, without delay—our painful diligence, without indulgence—our continual diligence, without weariness—that we be not satisfied with remaining on the skirts of the kingdom; that it be not a matter of doubt whether we belong to it or not; but that, grace being added to grace, “so an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into”¹ all its rich consolations and everlasting joys.

43. *And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth: for I have hoped in thy judgments.*

FOR the sake of the Church and the world, not less than for our own sakes, let us give diligence to clear up our interest in the gospel, that “the joy of the Lord may be our strength” in his service. The want of personal assurance not only brings a loss in our own experience, but a hindrance to usefulness within our appointed sphere. Hence our efforts are often powerless in parrying off the attack of “*him that reproaches us*,” and our attempts to “strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees”² of our brethren unavailing. At some times the dread of the charge of hypocrisy—at other times the absence of the only “constraining” principle—“the love of

¹ 2 Peter i. 5—11.

² Isaiah xxxv. 3.

Christ”¹—stops the utterance of “*the word of truth,*” damps our privilege, and obscures our character as a witness for our God and Saviour.² Justly, indeed, might he punish our unfaithfulness in the neglect of this spiritual weapon, by forbidding us to speak any more in his name; and therefore in deprecating this grievous judgment, the child of God conscious of guilt will cast himself at the footstool of mercy—“*Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth.*” Not only take it not out of my heart, but let it be ready in my mouth for a confession of my Master.

Some of us have known the pain and sorrow, when the indulgence of worldly habits and conversation has paralyzed our ability to stand up boldly for our God. The plea of bashfulness or judicious caution in excuse for silence is, however, in many instances, a self-deceptive covering for the real cause of restraint—the want of apprehension of the mercy of God to the soul. “All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and *thy saints shall bless thee.* They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.”³ Wisdom is indeed required to know when, as well as what, to speak. “There is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak;”⁴ and “the prudent shall keep silence in that time.”⁵ But it will be always well to examine, whether it is our cross to be “dumb with silence”—whether, when we “hold our peace even from good, our sorrow is stirred,” and our “heart hot with us, and the fire burning.”⁶ Oh! let “not the word of truth be taken *utterly* out of our mouth.”

¹ 2 Cor. v. 13.

³ Psalm cxlv. 10—13.

⁵ Amos v. 13.

² See Isaiah xliii. 10.

⁴ Eccles. iii. 7.

⁶ Psalm xxxix. 2, 3.

If we cannot say all we want of our Saviour, let us say all we can. A word spoken in weakness may be a word of Almighty power, and a present help to one of the Lord's "little ones." Many opportunities also in our connexions with the world will unexpectedly offer, when the heart is wakeful and active to improve them. The common topics of earthly conversation may furnish a channel for heavenly intercourse; so that our communications even with the world may be like Jacob's ladder, "whose bottom rested upon the earth, but the top reached unto the heavens."¹ And oh! what a relief is it to the burdened conscience, if but a few words can be stammered out for God, even though there are no sensible refreshings of his presence upon the soul!

But in order that *the word of truth* may come out of our mouth, it must be well stored in the heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."² "Let then the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom,"³ that it may be ready for every opportunity of usefulness. Let the heart be filled with this heavenly treasure. Then will it be always "inditing a good matter, speaking of the things touching the king;" and then will "our tongue be the pen of a ready writer."⁴ This prayer is the same confidence of faith that was expressed in the preceding

¹ Gen. xxviii. 12. 'Why do I make any of my visits to any of my neighbours, or countenance their visits unto me? Lord, I desire to let fall something, that may be for the good of the company; even, that more may be known of thee, and done for thee, from what passes in it. And when I propose to ingratiate myself unto any people by the civilities of conversation, it shall be, that I may gain thereby the better advantages to prosecute purposes upon them. In conversation, I would especially lay hold on all advantages to introduce as much as I can of a lovely Christ into the view of all that I come near unto.'—*Cotton Mather, Student and Pastor*, pp. 74, 75.

² Matt. xii. 34.

³ Col. iii. 16.

⁴ Psalm xlv. 1, 2.

verse—“*For I have hoped in thy judgments*”—an acceptable spirit of approach to God, and an earnest of the revival of life and comfort in the Lord’s best time and way.

44. *So shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever.*

THE heaping up of so many words in this short verse, appears to be the struggle of the soul to express the vehemency of its longings to glorify its Saviour. And indeed the Lord’s return to us, unsealing the lips of the dumb, and putting his word again into our mouth, brings with it a fresh sense of constraining obligation. This fresh occupation in his praise and service is not only our present privilege, but an antepast of our heavenly employment, when the word will never more “*be taken out of our mouth;*” but we shall “*talk of his wondrous works*”¹ “*for ever and ever.*” The defects in the constancy and extent of our obedience (as far as our hearts are alive to the honour of God,) must ever be our grief and burden; and the prospect of its completeness in a better world, is that which renders the anticipation of heaven so delightful. There we shall be blest with suitable feelings, and therefore be enabled to render suitable obedience—even one unbroken consecration of all our powers to his work. Then “*shall we keep his law continually for ever and ever.*” When once we have found admittance to the throne of God, we “*shall serve him day and night in his temple,*”²—without sin—without inconstancy,—without weariness,—without end! We speak of heaven; but oh! to be there!

¹ Verse 27.

² Rev. vii. 15.

To be engaged throughout eternity in the service of love to a God of love! In one day's continuance in the path of obedience even here, in the midst of the defilement which stains our holiest services, how sweetly do the minutes roll away! But to be for ever employed for him, in that place, where "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth"¹—this gives an emphasis and a dignity to the heavenly joy, which may well stamp it as "unspeakable, and full of glory."² May we not then encourage the hope, that the Lord is making us meet for heaven, by the strength and constancy of our desires to "*keep the law of God?*" And is it not evident, that heaven itself can afford no real delight to one, who feels the service of God on earth to be irksome. He stands self-excluded by the constitution of his nature, by the necessity of the case. He has no heart for heaven, no taste for heaven, no capacity for the enjoyment of heaven—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."³

Heavenly, gracious Father! who and what are we, that our hearts should be made the unworthy recipients of thy grace? that our wills should be subdued into "the obedience of faith?" and that we should be permitted to anticipate the blessed period, when we shall "*keep thy law continually for ever and ever?*" May this prospect realize the happiness of our present obedience! May he, who has "bought us with a price" for his glory, reign in our hearts, and live upon our lips; that each of us may have his mark upon our foreheads—the seal of his property in us,

¹ Rev. xxi. 27.² 1 Peter i. 8.³ Rev. xxii. 11.

and of our obligation to him—"Whose I am, and whom I serve!"¹

45. *And I will walk at liberty ; for I seek thy precepts.*

It was a fine expression of a heathen—"to serve God is to reign;"² and certainly David appears to have found the *liberty* of a king in linking his affections to the service of God. *The precepts of God* were not forced upon him; for he *sought them*, as the source of continual enjoyment. Hear what he says of them—"More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them there is great reward."³ The way of the Lord, which to the man of the world is beset with thorns and briers on every side, to the child of God is a way of liberty. Without fear or anxiety, in the gladness of his heart and the rejoicing of his conscience, he walks on the king's highway. Even in "*seeking these precepts*," there is "*liberty*" to be enjoyed, unknown to the worldling, the sensualist, or the professor: an enlargement of heart, a natural motion, like that of the sun in his course, "going forth as a bridegroom, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race."⁴ What must it be, then, to walk in the full enjoyment of *the precepts* of God! "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "They

¹ Acts xxvii. 23.

² "In regno vivimus. Deo servare est regnare."—*Seneca*. When the female martyr Agatha was upbraided, because being descended of an illustrious parentage, she stooped to mean and humble offices—"Our nobility"—she replied—"lies in this; that we are the servants of Christ."—*Bishop Sumner's Evidences*, pp. 359, 360.

³ Psalm xix. 10, 11.

⁴ *Ib.* 5.

shall sing in the ways of the Lord" ¹—"for how great, is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" ²

Are we then obeying *the precepts* as our duty, or "*seeking*" them as our privilege? Oh! beware, lest allowed unfaithfulness in any part of your walk with God straiten and cripple your soul. The glow of spiritual activity, and the healthfulness of Christian liberty are only to be found in a persevering and self-denying pursuit of every track of the ways of God. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." ³ To have the whole stream of all our thoughts, actions, motives, desires, affections, carried in one undivided current towards God, is indeed most delightful evidence of the complete and unrestrained influence of love upon our hearts.

There will often be considerable difficulty in suppressing the corrupt and rebellious inclinations of the natural mind; but as long as indulgence is denied, conflict excited, and resistance maintained in the constant endeavour to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," ⁴—our liberty is established, even where it is not always enjoyed. Every fresh chain by which we bind ourselves to the Lord, makes us feel more free. ⁵ While, then, they that "promise us liberty are themselves the servants of corruption." ⁶ Let us live as the children of God—the heirs of the kingdom—grateful,—free,—blood-bought souls—remembering the infinite cost at which our liberty was purchased, and the moment of extreme

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 17. Psalm cxxxviii. 5.

² Zech. ix. 17.

³ John viii. 31, 32, 36.

⁴ 2 Cor. x. 5.

⁵ Jugum Christi non deterit, sed honestat colla.—*Bernard.*

⁶ 2 Peter ii. 19. Compare John viii. 34.

peril when we were saved. When the flesh was weak, and the "law weak through the flesh,"¹ and no resolutions that we could make or perform, could extricate us from the yoke of sin—then it was that "Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living."² We are "delivered from the hand of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear."³ And then indeed do we "*walk at liberty*" in the way of "*his precepts*," when we "break the bands" of all other lords "asunder," and consecrate ourselves entirely to his service. "*O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.*"⁴

46. *I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.*

"*Liberty in walking*" in the Lord's ways will naturally produce boldness in "*speaking*" of them. Compare the conduct of the three unshaken witnesses

¹ Rom. viii. 3.

² Rom. xiv. 9.

³ Luke i. 74.

⁴ Isaiah xxvi. 13. An incident in the history of ancient Rome may furnish an illustration of that full liberty and entireness of heart, which forms the act of acceptable surrender to the Lord. When the people of Collatia were negotiating an unconditional capitulation to the Romans, Egerius, on the part of the Romans, inquired of the ambassadors—'Are the people of Collatia in their own power?' When an affirmative answer was given, it was next inquired—'Do you deliver up yourselves—the people of Collatia—your city, your fields, your waters, your boundaries, your temples, your utensils, *all your property*, divine and human, into my power and the power of the Roman people?' '*We surrender all.*' 'And so,' said he, 'I accept you.'—*Livy*, Book i. Such may my surrender be to the Lord. Disentangled from every other yoke, under no bonds that ought to bind me, Lord, I offer myself, and all that belongs to me, without exception or reserve, at thy feet. "But who am I that I should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have I given thee." 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

of the truth before the Babylonish monarch.¹ Mark the difference of the spirit displayed by the Apostles, and especially by Peter, before and after the day of Pentecost.² Look at Stephen before the council,³ and Paul before Felix,⁴ Festus,⁵ and Agrippa.⁶ "God had not given to them the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."⁷ In this spirit we find the great Apostle testifying of himself—"I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also,"—at the metropolis of the world, in the face of all opposition and contempt, and at the imminent hazard of my life—"For," says he, "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.*"⁸ In the same determination of soul, he exhorts his dear son in the faith—"Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner."⁹ With how many does "the fear of man bring a snare?"¹⁰ Many a good soldier has faced the cannon's mouth with undaunted front, and yet shrunk away with a coward's heart from the reproach of the cross, and been put to the blush even by the mention of the Saviour's name. Far better—the son of man "strengthening you"—to brave the fiery furnace or the den of lions in his service, than like Jonah, by flinching from the cross, incur the sting of conscience and the frown of God.¹¹

Professing Christians! Are we ready to bear our testimony for Jesus, when the sneer and ridicule of the ungodly are to be encountered? We have not to face the enmity of "*kings.*" We are not likely to "be

¹ Dan. iii. 16—18.

² Contrast Matt. xxvi. 56, 69, 75, with Acts ii. iii. iv. v. We can scarcely believe that the same persons are alluded to. But the explanation of the difficulty had been given by anticipation. John vii. 39.

³ Acts vi. vii.

⁴ Acts xxiv.

⁵ Acts xxv.

⁶ Ib. xxvi.

⁷ 2 Tim. 1—7.

⁸ Rom. i. 15, 16.

⁹ 2 Tim. i. 8.

¹⁰ Prov. xxix. 25.

¹¹ Dan. iii. 16—18; vi. 16—22, with Jonah i. 1—15.

brought before kings and rulers for the Son of Man's sake." ¹ Yet Divine help and strong faith are not less needed by us in withstanding the enmity of a prejudiced relative or scornful neighbour. Young people! you are perhaps in especial danger of being ashamed of your Bible, your religion, your Saviour. You may be brought under the "snare" of "fear of man," and be tempted to compromise your religion, and to sacrifice your everlasting all from a dread of "the reproach of Christ." But remember him, who for your sake "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;" ² and will the dread of a name restrain you from sharing his reproach, and banish the obligations of love and gratitude from your hearts? Have you forgotten that you once owned the service of Satan? and will you not be bold for Christ, as you were for him? Were you once "glorying in your shame?" and will you now be ashamed of your glory? Oh! remember who hath said—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." ³ Think much and often of this word. Think on this day. Think on the station of "the fearful and unbelieving" on the left hand on that day. Think on their eternal doom; ⁴ and pray and tremble for yourselves. If you are sincere in your determination, and simple in your dependence, then will the "love of Christ constrain you," ⁵ not to a cold, calculating, reluctant service; but to a confession of your Saviour, bold, unfettered, and "faithful even unto death." ⁶ Every deviation from the straight path

¹ Luke xxi. 12. Mark xiii. 9.

³ Mark viii. 38.

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 14.

² 1 Tim. vi. 13.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 8.

⁶ Rev. ii. 10.

bears the character of being ashamed of Christ. How much have you to speak in behalf of his testimonies, his ways, his love! When in danger of the influence of the fear of man, look to him for strength. He will give to you—as he gave to Stephen—“a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist.”¹ Thus will you, like them, be strengthened “to profess a good profession before many witnesses.”²

47. *And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.*

It is but poor comfort to the believer to be able to talk well to others upon the ways of God, and even to “bear the reproach” of his people, when his own heart is cold, insensible and dull. He longs for “*delight*” in these ways; and he shall *delight in them*. And why do we not more boldly use the language of faith, and say—“*I will delight myself in thy commandments?*” That which is the burden of the carnal heart is the delight of the renewed soul. The former “is enmity against God; and therefore is not, and cannot be, subject to his law.”³ The latter can *delight* in nothing else. If the gospel separates the heart from the delights of a sinful world, it is only to make room for delights of a more elevated, satisfying, and enduring nature.⁴ Satan indeed generally baits his temptations with that seductive witchery, which the world calls pleasure. But has he engrossed all pleasure into his service? Are there no pleasures besides “the

¹ Luke xxi. 15, with Acts vi. 10.

² 1 Tim. vi. 12.

³ Rom. viii. 7.

⁴ *delectationes non amittimus, sed mutamus*—was the expression of one of the ancients. ‘I live a voluptuous life,’ said the excellent Joseph Alleine to his wife, ‘but it is upon spiritual dainties, such as the world know not, nor taste not of.’

pleasures of sin?" Can the ways of the Lord promise nothing but difficulty and trial? What means then the experience of him, who could "rejoice in them, as much as in all riches," and who "loved them above gold, yea, above fine gold?"¹ The marrow and fatness of our Father's house is surely a most gainful exchange for the husks of the "far country."² The joy of the saint is not that false, polluted, deadly joy, which is all that the worldling knows, and all that he has to look for; but it flows spontaneously from the fountain of living waters through the pure channel of "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Nay, so independent is it of any earthly spring, that it never flourishes more than in the desolate wilderness, or the sick-bed solitude; so that, "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation."³ The world see what religion takes away, but they see little of what it gives;⁴ else, instead of pitying our folly, they would reproach their own blindness. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."⁵

Acceptable obedience must however flow from love, and be accompanied with a measure of "*delight*." And surely at the very time that we are "abhorring

¹ Verses 14, 127.

² Luke xv. 13—24.

³ Hab. iii. 17, 18.

⁴ Cyprian in one of his Epistles (ad Donat.) mentions the great difficulty he found in overcoming the false view of the gloom of religion—little suspecting that the cause of the gloom was in himself—not in the gospel. But this is explained, Matt. vi. 23.

⁵ Isaiah lxx. 13, 14.

ourselves in dust and ashes" before our God, we have every reason to *delight in his commandments*; and it cannot be entirely right with us, until something of this *delight* is felt and enjoyed. But do we complain of the dulness of our hearts, that restrains the "*joyous pleasure in the commandments of God?*" Let us seek for a deeper impression of redeeming love. This will be the spring of grateful obedience and holy delight. Let us turn our complaints into prayers, and the Lord will quickly turn them into praises. Let us watch against every thing, that would intercept our communion with Jesus. Distance from him must be accompanied with poverty of spiritual enjoyment—"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light shall we see light."¹

48. *My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved: and I will meditate in thy statutes.*

SCARCELY any expression seems to be equal to set forth the fervency of David's love and delight in the ways and word of God. Here we find him, "*lifting up his hands*" with the gesture of one, who is longing to embrace the object of his desire with both hands and his whole heart.² Perhaps also in "*lifting up his hands unto the commandments,*" he might mean to express his looking upward for assistance to keep them, and to live in them.³ But how humbling this comparison with ourselves! Alas! how often, from the neglect of this influence of the Spirit of God, do

¹ Psalm xxxvi. 8, 9.

² See Psalm cxliii. 6.

³ See Psalm xxviii. 2.

our "hands hang down," instead of being "*lifted up*" in these holy ways! We are too often content with a scanty measure of love, going from day to day without any sensible "hungering and thirsting after righteousness;" neither able to pray with life and power, nor to hear with comfort and profit, nor to "do good and to communicate" with cheerfulness, nor to meditate with spiritual delight, nor to live for God with zeal and interest, nor to anticipate the endurance of the cross with unflinching resolution—the soul being equally disabled for heavenly communion, or active devotedness. Oh! let us beware of looking for ease under the power of this deadening malady. Let us rather struggle and cry for deliverance from it. Let us subscribe ourselves before God as wretched, and helpless, and guilty. Let us encourage ourselves before him with the thought, *that he can look upon us*, and revive us. Let us "take hold upon his covenant," and plead, *that he will look upon us*. Let us put him in remembrance of the glory of his name, which is much more concerned in delivering us out of this frame, by his quickening and enlivening grace, than in leaving us, stupid, corrupt, and carnal in it. Professor! awake: or beg of the Lord to awaken you! For if your cold sleeping heart is contented with the prospect of a heaven hereafter, without seeking for a present foretaste of its blessed enjoyments, it may be a very questionable matter whether heaven will ever be yours.

Delight, however, will exercise itself in an habitual "*meditation in the statutes.*"¹ The breathing of the heart will be—"O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day."² It is in holy meditation

¹ See Psalm i. 2.

² Verse 97.

on the word of God, that all the graces of the Spirit are manifested. What is the principle of faith, but the reliance of the soul upon the promises of the word? What is the sensation of godly fear, but the soul trembling before the threatenings of God?¹ What is the object of hope, but the apprehended glory of God? What is the excitement of desire or love, but longing, endearing contemplations of the Saviour, and of his unspeakable blessings? Hence we can scarcely conceive of the influence of grace separated from spiritual meditation on the word. It is this which, under the teaching sought from above draws out its hidden contents, and exhibits them to the soul, as the objects, upon which the principles and affections of the Divine life are habitually exercised. Not that any benefit can be expected from meditation, even upon the word of God, as an abstract duty. If not closely joined and mixed with prayer, it will degenerate into dry speculative study. If not applied to some distinct practical purpose, it will be unedifying in itself, and unsatisfactory for the important ends designed by it—the discerning of the mind of God, and feeding upon the rich provision of the gospel.

Let it be a matter of daily inquiry—Does my reading of the word of God furnish food for my soul—matter for prayer—direction for conduct? Scriptural study, when entered upon in a prayerful spirit, will never, like many other studies, be unproductive. The mind that is engaged in it, is fitly set for bearing fruit; it will “bring forth fruit in due season.”² Meditation kindles love, as it is the effect of love—“While I was musing, the fire burned.”³ “Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth

¹ Verse 120.

² Psalm i. 2, 3.

³ Psalm xxxix. 3.

therein, this man is blessed in his deed.”¹ But let us take heed, that the root of religion in the soul is not cankered by the indulgence of secret sin. The largest supply of Christian ordinances will fail to refresh us, except the heart be kept right with God in simplicity of faith, love, and diligence in the service of Christ.

¹ James i. 25.

PART VII.

49. *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*

WHAT is faith? It is confidence, or *hope in God's word*. This is not the natural growth of the soil. It is the work of God. It is he that *causeth us to hope*. He "has not forgotten"—he cannot forget—his "*word, upon which he causes his servants to hope.*" But he permits—nay commands—they to remind him of it, in order to exercise their sincerity, earnestness, faith, and patience. Indeed though he has "*caused us to hope in his word,*" yet oftentimes, "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."¹ Still, however, let us constantly plead the promises of a faithful God at the throne of grace—"Remember the word unto thy servant." Indeed the proper use to be made of the promises, is to furnish "arguments, wherewith to fill our mouths, when we order our cause before God."² And when thus pleaded with the earnestness and humility of faith, they will be found to be the blessed realities of unchanging love.

Besides—Have you not found, Christian reader, some word of God made especially precious to your soul, as illustrated in the daily occurrences of Providence, or applied by the immediate power of the Spirit? Such words are thus made your own; and most important is it to you to lay them up in your heart against some future time of trial, when you may bring

¹ Prov. xiii. 12.

² Job xxiii. 4.

them before your God, and “ put him in remembrance ”¹ of them. Now let us apply this principle and exercise of faith to the invitations of the gospel. Have you not often been arrested by such a word as this—“ Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out ? ”² Then do not question your right, or neglect to plead it as a coming sinner—‘ Lord, *I hope in this thy word*—I believe that it is of thine own Spirit that I do *hope in it*—“ *Thou hast caused me to hope* ” in it. “ *Remember this word unto thy servant.* ” Thus does prayer form the promise of God into a prevailing argument, and send it back to heaven in the exercise of faith ; nothing doubting, but that it will be verified in God’s best time and way.³

Again—if you have ever found power in God’s word against any besetting sin, it will surely be an encouragement, when again beset by the temptation, to look to the same source for help. “ He who hath delivered, doth deliver, and will even to the end deliver.”⁴ He “ hath done great things for you ”—and is not this an earnest of more ? “ *Because thou hast been my help, therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.* ”⁵ Faith is not trusting what the eye sees, but what the word promises. And thus, may you—Believer—at any time confidently receive a promise as the distinct message to your soul, where you are conscious of a readiness to receive the whole word as the rule of your life. Oh ! does it not set an edge upon your prayers *to eye a promising God*, and to

¹ Isaiah xliii. 26.

² John vi. 37.

³ We may observe Jacob making precisely this use of the word of promise to great advantage, at a time of personal extremity. Gen. xxxii. 9, 10, 12, with xxxi. 3, 13, xxviii. 13—15. Was not this in fact pleading—“ *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope ?* ” Compare also verse 38 of this Psalm.

⁴ 2 Cor. i. 10.

⁵ Psalm lxiii. 7.

consider his promises — not as hanging in the air, without any definite direction or meaning, but as individually spoken and belonging to yourself as a child and servant of God? “*Remember the word unto thy servant.*” Indeed this is the experience and comfort of the life of faith. This unfolds the true secret of living to God. And this will end at last with the honourable death-bed testimony—“Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things, which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you; and not one thing hath failed thereof.”¹

50. *This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me.*

DAVID was encouraged to plead *the word* of promise in prayer, from the recollection of its “*comfort in his affliction.*” Never, indeed, are we left unsupported in such a time, or called to drink a cup of unmingled tribulation. In the moments of our bitterest sorrow, how are we compelled to stand amazed at the tenderness, which is daily and hourly exercised towards us! Whatever our affliction may be, we need never be at a loss for some word exactly suited to it, and which we could not have understood without it; and “a word” thus “*spoken in due season, how good is it!*”² One word of God, sealed to the heart, infuses more

¹ Joshua xxiii. 14.

² Prov. xv. 23. ‘I will show you a privilege that others want, and you have in this case. Such as are in prosperity, and are filled with earthly joys, and increased with children and friends; though the word of God is indeed written for their instruction, yet to you who are in trouble, and from whom the Lord hath taken many children, and whom he hath otherwise exercised, there are some chapters,

sensible relief, than ten thousand words of man. When therefore *the word* assures us of the presence of God in affliction; ¹ of the continued pity and sympathy of the Lord in his most severe dispensations; ² and of their certain issue to our everlasting good; ³ must not we say of *the word*—“*This is our comfort in our affliction?*” And how is it the channel, in which the Saviour’s love streams forth on every side; imparting life, refreshment and strength to those, who but for this comfort would have “fainted,” ⁴ and “perished in their affliction!” ⁵ This indeed was the end, for which the scriptures were written; ⁶ and such power of consolation have they sometimes administered to the afflicted saint, that tribulation has almost ceased to be a trial, and the retrospect has been the source of thankful recollection.

But those only, who have felt the *quickenin^g power of the word*, can realize its consolations. Be thankful, then, Reader, if, when dead in sins, it “*quicken^{ed} you;*” ⁷ and, when sunk in trouble, once and again it has revived you. ⁸ Yet think not, that it is any innate power of its own, that works so graciously for you. No. The exhibition of the Saviour is the spring of life and consolation. It is because it “testifies of him” ⁹ “the consolation of Israel” ¹⁰—“afflicted in all afflictions” ¹¹—and never failing to uphold with

some particular promises in the word of God, made in an especial manner, which would never have been yours, so as they now are, if you had had your portion in this world like others. It is no small comfort that God hath written some scriptures to you, which he hath not to others. Read these, and think God is like a friend, who sendeth a letter to a whole house and family, but who speaketh in his letter to some by name, that are dearest to him in the house.—*Rutherford’s Letters.*

¹ Isaiah xliii. 1, 2.

² Exod. iii. 7.

³ Rom. viii. 28.

⁴ Psalm xxvii. 13.

⁵ Verse 92.

⁶ Rom. xv. 4.

⁷ James i. 18. 1 Peter i. 23.

⁸ Verses 81, 82.

⁹ John v. 39.

¹⁰ Luke ii. 25.

¹¹ Isaiah lxiii. 9.

“ grace sufficient for us.”¹ It is not, however, the word without the Spirit, nor the Spirit generally without the word; but the Spirit by the word—first putting life into the word,² and then by the word quickening the soul. The word then is only the instrument. The Spirit is the Almighty agent. Thus the work is the Lord’s, and nothing is left for us, but the exercise of self-renunciation, and the song of praise.

51. *The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.*

THE SCORN of an ungodly world is one of the *afflictions*, which realize to us *the comfort of the word*. And this is a trial from which no exemption is to be expected—*All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*³ Not even David—though a king—a man of wisdom and prudence, and therefore not likely to provoke unnecessary offence, and whose character and rank might be expected to command respect—not even was he shielded from “ *the derision of the proud*” on account of the profession and service of his God. Thus it ever was, and ever will be. Faith in the doctrines of Christ and conformity to the strict commandments of the gospel, must expose us to the taunts of the unbeliever and the worldling. Yet, where the heart is right with God, the “ *derision of the proud,*” instead of forcing us to “ *decline from the law of God,*” will strengthen our adherence to it. David answered the bitter “ *derision of Michal* with a stronger resolution to abide by his God—“ I will yet be more vile than thus.”⁴ He counted it his glory,

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

² 2 Tim. iii. 12.

³ John vi. 63.

⁴ 2 Sam. vi. 20—22.

his duty, his joy. None however but a believer knows what it is to bear this cross; and none but a real believer can bear it. It is one of the touchstones of sincerity, the application of which has often been the means of "separating the precious from the vile," and has unmasked the self-confident professor to his own confusion. Oh! how many make a fair profession, and appear "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," until the hour of danger proves them deserters, and they reap only the fruits of their self-confidence in their own confusion.

It is, therefore, of great importance to those who are just setting out in the warfare, to be well armed with the word of God. It kept David stedfast amidst "*the derision of the proud;*" and it will keep young Christians from being frightened or overcome by the sneer of an ungodly world. But that it may "dwell in us *richly in all wisdom,*"¹ and be suited to our own case, it will be well under circumstances of reproach to acquaint ourselves with the supporting promises and encouragements to suffer for righteousness' sake.² Above all, the contemplation of the great sufferer himself—meeting this poignant trial in meekness,³ compassion, and prayer⁴—will exhibit "a refuge from the storm, and a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as the storm against the wall."⁵ The mere professor knows not this refuge; he possesses not this armour; so that, "when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake,

¹ Col. iii. 16.

² Such as the benediction of the Saviour. Luke vi. 22, 23, confirmed by the recorded experience of the Lord's most favoured servants the Apostles—Acts v. 41. Paul especially, 2 Cor. xii. 10; Col. i. 24,—the disciples of Thessalonica, 1 Thess. i. 6,—the Hebrew Christians, Heb. x. 34.

³ Psalm xxii. 6—8. Luke xxiii. 35. 1 Peter ii. 23.

⁴ Luke xxiii. 34.

⁵ Isaiah xxv. 4.

immediately he is offended.”¹ Blessed be God! the weapons of our warfare are drawn from the Divine armoury; and therefore, depending on the grace, and following the example, of Jesus, we shall find that to suffer is the way to victory—the road to an everlasting crown.

52. *I remember thy judgments of old, O Lord; and have comforted myself.*

THE recollections of the Lord's former dealings with his people were David's support, while smarting under "the scourge of the tongue."² And perhaps few subjects of meditation are more fruitful in encouragement. We are ready to imagine something peculiar in our own case, and to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, "as though some strange thing happened unto" us;³ but when we "*remember the Lord's judgments of old,*" with his people, we "*comfort ourselves*" in the assurance, that the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren, that have been in the world;⁴ and that "as the sufferings of Christ have abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ."⁵ They always encountered the same "*derision of the proud,*" and always experienced the same support from the faithfulness of their God. We do not probably remember, as we ought, the mercy and gracious wisdom of God in occupying so much of his written word with the records of his "*judgments of old.*" With some, a prominent attention is paid to the preceptive, and with others to the doctrinal parts of revelation—each class seeming to forget that the historical records

¹ Mark iv. 17.

² Job v. 21.

³ 1 Peter iv. 12.

⁴ 1 Peter v. 9.

⁵ 2 Cor. i. 5.

comprise a full and striking illustration of both, and in this view have always proved most supporting grounds of consolation to the Lord's people. There must indeed obviously have been some important design in casting so large a portion of the small volume of Revelation into an historical form: and the design that appears throughout is every way worthy of its author. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through *patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*;"¹ and how admirably adapted the means are to the end, those who are most diligent in the search of the Scripture-field will bear ample witness. Whoever, therefore, wilfully neglect the historical portion of the sacred volume, from the idea of confining their attention to what they deem the more spiritual parts of Scripture—they show a sad deficiency of spiritual apprehension, and deprive themselves of most valuable instruction, and most abundant comfort. From this view of the design of the historical records, it is plain that the neglect of them would exclude us from one eminent means of increasing "patience," in the example of those, "who through faith and patience inherit the promises"—of receiving "comfort," in the experience of the faithfulness of God manifested in every age to his people, and of enlivening our "hope," in marking the happy issue of the "patience of the saints," and the heavenly support administered unto them.² So far, therefore, are we from being little interested in the scriptural records of past ages, that it is evident, that the sacred historians as well as the prophets,

¹ Romans xv. 4.

² In this view, the recollection of the Lord's judgments of old "puts a new song into the mouth" of the Church of "thanksgiving unto her God." Isaiah xxv. 1—4.

“ministered not unto themselves, but unto us, the things which are now reported.”¹

Let us select one or two instances as illustrative of this subject. Why were the records of the deluge, and of the overthrow of the cities of the plain preserved, but as exhibitions to the church, that “the Lord”—the Saviour of Noah, the eight persons, and the deliverer of just Lot—“knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished?”² What a source of *comfort* then to the tempted people of God are the “*remembrances of these judgments of old!*” and if we instance the wonderful history of the overthrow of the Egyptians, and the consequent deliverance of God’s ancient people, we may continually observe the church recollecting this interposition as a ground of assurance, that under similar circumstances of trial, the same illustrious displays of Divine faithfulness and love may be confidently expected. She looks back upon what has been done by the “arm of the Lord in ancient days, and in the generation of old,” as the pattern of what the Lord ever would be, and ever would do, for his purchased people.³ Thus also God himself recalls to our mind this overthrow and deliverance as a ground of present encouragement and support—“*According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things*”⁴—and the Church echoes back this remembrance in the expression of her faith, gratitude, and expectation for spiritual blessings—“*He will subdue our iniquities! and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*”⁵ Such is the interesting

¹ 1 Peter i. 12.

² 2 Peter ii. 5—9.

³ Isaiah lii. 9—11.

⁴ Micah vii. 15.

⁵ Micah vii. 19.

use that may be made of the historical parts of Scripture. Such is the “*comfort*” to be derived from the “*remembrance of the Lord’s judgments of old!*” And is not the recollection of his “*judgments of old*” with ourselves, productive of the same support? Does not the retrospect of his dealings with our own souls serve to convince us, that all his paths are mercy and truth?”¹ The assurance is therefore warranted alike by experience and by Scripture,—“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”²

53. *Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law.*

THE *remembrance of the Lord’s judgments of old*, while it brings *comfort* to his people as regards themselves, stirs up a poignancy of compassionate feeling for the ungodly. And indeed to a feeling and reflecting mind, the condition of the world must excite commiseration and concern! A “*whole world lying in wickedness!*”³ lying therefore in ruins! the image of God effaced! the presence of God departed! “*Horror hath taken hold of me!*” to see *the law* of Him, who gave being to the world, so little regarded! so utterly *forsaken!* so much light and love shining from heaven in vain! The earthly heart cannot endure that any restraint should be imposed; much less that any constraint, even of love, should be employed to change its bias, and turn it back to its God. Are you then a believer? then will you be most tender of the honour of the law of God. Every stroke at his law

¹ Psalm xxv. 10.

² Romans viii. 28.

³ 1 John v. 19.

you will feel as a stroke at your own heart. Are you a believer? then will you consider every man as your brother; and weep to see so many of them around you, crowding the broad road to destruction, and perishing as the miserable victims of their own deceivings. The prospect on every side is, as if God were cast down from his throne, and the creatures of his hand were murdering their own souls.

But how invariably does a declining state — a languor respecting our own eternal interest — affect the tenderness of our regard for the honour of our God; so that we can look at “*the wicked that forsake God’s law*” with comparative indifference and unconcern! Awful indeed is the thought that it ever can be with us a small matter, that multitudes are sinking! going down into perdition! with the name of Christ—under the seal of baptism—partakers of the means of gospel grace—yet perishing! Not indeed that we are to yield to a feeling of “*horror*” that would paralyze all our powers of exertion on their behalf. For do we owe them no duty — no prayer—no labour? Shall we look upon souls hurrying on with such dreadful haste to unutterable, everlasting torments; and permit them to rush on blinded, unawakened, unalarmed! If there is a “*horror*” to see a brand apparently fitting for the fire, will there not be a wrestling endeavour to pluck that brand out of the fire? Have we quite forgotten in our own case the fearful terrors of an unconverted state—the Almighty power of wrath and justice armed against us—the thunder of that voice—“Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord?”¹ Oh! if the love of the Saviour and the love of souls were

¹ Heb. x. 30, with Deut. xxxii. 35.

reigning with more mighty influence in our hearts, how much more devoted should we be in our little sphere of labour! how much more enlarged in our supplications, until all the kingdom of Satan were subject to the obedience of the Son of God, and conquered by the force of his omnipotent love!

But if the spirit of David, renewed but in part, was thus filled with *horror* in the contemplation of the wicked—what must have been the affliction—what the intensity of His sufferings—“who was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”¹—yea, “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity”²—during thirty-three years of continued contact with a world of sin? What shall we say of the condescension of his love, in wearing “the likeness of sinful flesh”³—dwelling among sinners—yea, “receiving sinners, and eating with them!”⁴

Blessed Spirit! impart to us more of “the mind that was in Christ Jesus!” that the law of God may be increasingly precious in our eyes, and that we may be “exceedingly jealous for the Lord God of Hosts!” Help us by thy gracious influence, to plead with sinners for God, and to plead for sinners with God!

54. *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.*

COME, Christian pilgrim, and beguile your wearisome journey heavenward by “singing the Lord’s song in this strange land.”⁵ With “*the statutes of God*” in your hand and in your heart, you are furnished with a song for every step of your way—“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He

¹ Heb. vii. 26.

² Hab. i. 13. Compare Psalm v. 5.

³ Rom. viii. 3.

⁴ Luke xv. 2.

⁵ Psalm cxxxvii. 4.

maketh to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."¹ How delightfully does this song bring before you Him, who having laid down his life for you, engages himself as your Provider, your Keeper, your Guide, your faithful and unchangeable friend! A song such as this therefore cannot fail to smooth your path, and reconcile you to the many inconveniences of the way; while the recollection, that this is only "*the house of your pilgrimage*" and not your home; and that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God,"² will support the exercise of faith and patience to the end. How striking the contrast between *the wicked that forsake the law*, and the Christian *pilgrim*, who makes it the subject of his daily song, and the source of his daily comfort! Yes, these same *statutes*, which are the yoke and burden of the ungodly, lead the true servant of the Lord from pleasure to pleasure; and, cherished by their vigorous influence, his way is made easy and prosperous. Evidently, therefore, our knowledge of the Lord's statutes, and our delight in them, will furnish a decisive test of our real state before God.

But what reason have we every moment to guard against the debasing, stupifying influence of the

¹ Psalm xxiii.

² Hebrews iv. 9.

world, which makes us forget the proper character of a pilgrim! And what habitual conflict must be maintained with the sloth and aversion of a reluctant heart to maintain our progress in the journey towards Zion! Reader! have you entered upon a pilgrim's life? Then what is your solace and refreshment on the road? It is dull, heavy, wearisome, to be a pilgrim without a "song." And yet it is only the blessed experience of the Lord's statutes that will tune our "song." "If therefore you have tasted that the Lord is gracious,"¹ if "he has thus put a new song into your mouth,"² oh! do not suffer any carelessness or neglect to rob you of this heavenly anticipation. And, that your lips be not found mute, seek to keep your heart in tune. Seek to maintain a lively contemplation of the place whither you are going—of Him, who as your "forerunner is for you entered"³ thither—and of the prospect, that, having "prepared a place for you, he will come again, and take you to himself; that where he is, there you may be also."⁴ In this spirit, and with these hopes before you, you may take up your song—"O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing, and give praise. I will bless the Lord at all times—his praise shall continually be in my mouth."⁵ Thus may you go on your *pilgrimage*, "singing in the ways of the Lord,"⁶ and commencing a song below, which in the world of praise above, shall never, never cease.⁷

¹ 1 Peter ii. 3.

² Hebrews vi. 20.

³ Psalm cviii. 1; xxxiv. 1.

⁷ Rev. iv. 8.

² Psalm xl. 3.

⁴ John xiv. 2, 3.

⁶ Psalm cxxxviii. 5.

55. *I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night,
and have kept thy law.*

IF at any time we are enabled to spend the waking moments of the night with God, "the darkness is no darkness with us, but the night shineth as the day." David often speaks of especial satisfaction and refreshment, when he "*remembered the name of his God in the night.*"¹ Many a tried believer can recommend this cordial for the distressing restlessness of a wakeful night, as having found it more restorative to the quiet of his earthly frame, than the most sovereign specifics of the medical world.—"So he giveth his beloved sleep."² And if, in any "*night*" of affliction we feel the hand of the Lord grievous to us, do we not find in "*the remembrance of the Lord*" a never-failing support? What does our darkness arise from, but from our forgetfulness of God, blotting out for a while the lively impressions of his tender care, his unchanging faithfulness, and his mysterious methods of working his gracious will? And to bring up as it were from the grave the *remembrance of God's name*, as manifested in his promises, and in the dispensation of his love; this is indeed the "*light that is sown for the righteous,*"³ and which "*springeth up out of darkness.*"⁴ It is to eye the character of the Lord as All-wise to appoint, Almighty to secure, All-compassionate to sympathize and support. It is to recollect him as a "*father pitying his children;*"⁵ as a "*friend that loveth at all times,*"⁶ and "*that sticketh closer than a brother.*"⁷ And

¹ Psalm lxiii. 5, 6.

² Psalm cxxvii. 2.

³ Psalm xcvi. 11.

⁴ Psalm cxii. 4.

⁵ Psalm ciii. 13.

⁶ Prov. xvii. 17.

⁷ Prov. xviii. 24.

even in those seasons of depression, when the indulgence of sin, or the neglect of tenderness of spirit, have brought the darkness of night upon the soul, though "*the remembrance of the name of the Lord*" may be grievous, yet it opens the way to consolation. It tells us, that there is a way made for our return; that "the Lord waiteth that he may be gracious;"¹ and that in the first step of our return to our father, we shall find him full of mercy to his backsliding children.² And thus, though "weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."³

But let us inquire into the Lord's revelation of his own name; and we shall then more clearly conceive of its support in the darkest midnight of tribulations. "And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him (Moses); and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed—The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and will by no means clear the guilty."⁴ Can we wonder that such a name as this should be exhibited as a ground of trust? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee."⁵ Even our suffering Lord appears to have derived support from "*the remembrance of the name of the Lord in the night*" of desertion—"O my God, I cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*"⁶ And from the

¹ Isaiah xxx. 18.

² Psalm xxx. 5.

³ Prov. xviii. 10. Psalm ix. 10.

⁴ See Luke xv. 20—24.

⁵ Exodus xxxiv. 5—7.

⁶ Psalm xxii. 2, 3.

experience of this source of consolation, we find the tempted Saviour directing his tempted people to the same support—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him *trust in the name of the Lord*, and stay upon his God."¹ Indeed all the rest that can be anticipated in this world of trouble can come only from this source—the "*remembrance of the Lord's name*"—what he is in himself, and what he has promised to be to us. How vast then are our obligations to his dear Son, as the only medium, by which this *name* could ever be known or *remembered*!—"No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."²

As, however, we are taught to know his name, the remembrance of the support received from it will be a constraining motive to obedience. We shall "*keep his law*," when we "*remember his name*." A sense of our obligations will impel us forward into the path of duty, and will indeed have a most happy influence in promoting diligence, heavenly-mindedness, and self-devotedness in whatever sphere of action may be appointed for us. Obedience will partake far more of the character of privilege than of duty, when an enlightened knowledge of God is the principle of action.

56. *This I had, because I kept thy precepts.*

How is it, believer, that you are enabled to "*sing of the Lord's statutes*"—and to "*remember his name*?" *This you have, because you keep his*

¹ Isaiah i. 10.

² John i. 18; also xiv. 6. Matt. xi. 27.

precepts. Thus you are able to tell the world, that “in keeping his commandments there is great reward”¹—that the “work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.”² Christian! let your testimony be clear and decided—that ten thousand worlds cannot bestow the happiness of one day’s devotedness to the service of your Lord. For is it not in this path that you realize fulness of joy in “fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ?” “He that hath *my commandments* and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will *manifest myself* to him—my Father will love him; and *we will come* unto him, and make our abode with him.”³ If you were walking more closely with God in “the obedience of faith,” the world would never dare to accuse religion as the source of melancholy and despondency. No man has any right to the hope of happiness in a world of tribulation, but he that seeks it in the favour of his God. Nor can any enjoy this favour, except as connected in the exercise of faith with conformity to the will, and delight in the law, of his God.

But let us remark how continually David was enriching his treasury of spiritual experience with some fresh view of the dealings of God with his soul; some answer to prayer, or some increase of consolation, which he records for his own encouragement, and for the use of the church of God. Let us seek to imitate him in this respect; and we shall often be enabled to say as he does—“*This I had*”—this comfort I enjoyed—this support in trouble—this remarkable manifesta-

¹ Psalm xix. 11.

² Isaiah xxxii. 17.

³ John xiv. 21, 23, with 1 John i. 3, 4; iii. 24.

tion of his love—this confidence I was enabled to maintain—“*this I had*”—it was made my own—“*because I kept thy precepts.*” And how important in the absence of spiritual enjoyment to examine—“is there not a cause?” and what is the cause? Have not “strangers devoured my strength; and I knew it not?”¹ Is the Lord “with me as in months past?² with me in my closet?—with me in my family?—with me at my table?—with me in my daily employments and intercourse with the world? When I hear the faithful people of God telling of his love, and saying—“*This I had*”—must I not, if unable to join their cheerful acknowledgment, trace it to my unfaithful walk, and say—“*This I had*” not—because I have failed in obedience to thy precepts; because I have been careless and self-indulgent; because I have slighted thy love; because I have “grieved thy Holy Spirit,” and forgotten to ask for the old paths, that I might walk therein, and find rest to my soul?”³ Oh! let this scrutiny and recollection of our ways realize the constant need of the finished work of Jesus, as our ground of acceptance, and source of strength. This will bring healing—restoration—increasing devotedness—tenderness of conscience—circumspection of walk, and a determination not to rest, until we can make this grateful acknowledgment our own. At the same time, instead of boasting that our own arm, our own diligence, or holiness, “have gotten us” into this favour, we shall cast all our attainments at the feet of Jesus, and crown him Lord of all for ever.

¹ Hosea vii. 9.² Job xxix. 2.

Jer. vi. 16. ‘

PART VIII.

57. *Thou art my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep thy words.*

MAN, as a dependent being, must be possessed of some portion. He cannot live upon himself. He must also have a large portion, because the powers and capacities to be filled are large. If he has not a satisfying portion, he is a wretched empty creature. But where and how is he to find this portion? "There be many that say—Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!"¹ Ah! who can speak of the goodness of the Lord, in having offered himself as *the portion* of an unworthy sinner, and having engaged to employ his perfections for his happiness? Or who can speak of the folly, and madness, and guilt, of the sinner, in choosing his "portion in this life;"² as if there was no God on the earth, no way of access to him, or no happiness to be found in him? That such madness should be found in the heart of man, is a most affecting illustration of his departure from God; but that *God's own* "*people*" should commit these two evils—forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out broken cisterns for themselves"—is the fearful astonishment of heaven itself.³

But we cannot know and enjoy God as our *portion*, except as he has manifested himself in his dear Son in the covenant of grace. And in the knowledge and

¹ Psalm iv. 6.

² Ib. xvii. 14.

³ Jer. ii. 12, 13.

enjoyment of him, we have little reason to envy those, who "in their lifetime receive their good things,"¹ and therefore have nothing more to expect. Never indeed does the poverty of the worldling's portion appear more striking than when contrasted with the enjoyment of a child of God²—"Soul"—said the rich fool—"thou hast much goods laid up for many years. But God said—This night thy soul shall be required of thee."³ Augustine's prayer was—"Lord give me thyself!"⁴ And in this spirit the believer is ready to exult—"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire but thee. Return unto thy rest, O my soul. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup. Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel."⁵ Surely the whole world cannot weigh against the comfort of being able to let all go, and look up—"Thou art my portion, O Lord." For it is as impossible, that his own people can ever be impoverished, as that his own perfections should moulder away. But a portion—implies not a source of ordinary pleasure—but of rest and satisfaction, such as leaves nothing else to be desired. Thus *the Lord* can never be enjoyed, even by his own children—except as a *portion*—not only above all, but in the place of all. Other objects indeed may be subordinately loved, but of none but himself must we say, "He is *altogether lovely*."⁶ "In all things he must have the preeminence."⁷ One with the Father in our affections,

¹ Luke xvi. 25; vi. 24.

² Comp. Psalm xvii. 14, 15.

³ Luke xii. 19, 20.

⁴ Da mihi te, Domine.

⁵ Psalm lxxiii. 25; cxvi. 7; xvi. 5—7.

⁶ Canticles v. 16.

⁷ Colossians i. 18.

as in his own subsistence.¹ The moment that any rival is allowed to usurp the throne of the heart, we open the door to disappointment and unsatisfied desires.

But if we take the Lord as our "*portion*," we must take him as our king. "*I have said—this is my deliberate resolution,—that I would keep thy words.*" Here is the Christian complete—taking *the Lord* as his "*portion*," and his *word* as his rule. And what energy for holy devotedness flows from the enjoyment of this our heavenly *portion*! Thus "delighting ourselves in the Lord, he gives us our heart's desire;"² and every desire identifies itself with his service. All that we are, and all that we have, are his; cheerfully surrendered as his right, and willingly employed in his work. Thus do we evidence our interest in his salvation; for "Christ became the *author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*"³

Reader! Inquire—was my choice of this Divine *portion* considerate, free, unreserved? Am I resolved, that it shall be steadfast and abiding? that death itself shall not separate me from the enjoyment of it! Am I ready to receive a Sovereign as well as a Saviour?⁴ Oh! let me have a whole Christ for my *portion*! Oh! let him have a whole heart for his possession. Oh! let me call nothing mine but him.

58. *I intreated thy favour with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to thy word.*

DELIGHT in the Lord as our "*portion*," naturally leads us to "*intreat his favour*" as "*life*,"⁵ and

¹ John x. 30.

² Heb. v. 9.

³ Psalm xxxvii. 4.

⁴ See Acts v. 31.

⁵ Psalm xxx. 5.

“better than life,”¹ to our souls. And if we have “said, that we would keep his words,” we shall still “intreat his favour” to strengthen and encourage us in his way. We shall “intreat it with our whole hearts,” as though we felt our infinite need of it, and were determined to wrestle for it in Jacob’s spirit—“I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”² If we have known what unspeakable happiness it is to be brought into the favour of God, “by the blood of Christ;”³ and if “by him also we have access unto that grace wherein we stand,”⁴ how shall we prize the sense of Divine favour, the light of our Father’s countenance! We shall never be weary of this source of daily enjoyment. It is to us as the light of the sun, which shineth every day with renewed and unabated pleasure. We “joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”⁵ Mercy, however, is the source of that “favour which we intreat;” and the word is the warrant of our expectation—“Be merciful unto us according to thy word.” As sinners, we need this “favour.” As believers, we “intreat” it, in the assurance that praying breath, as the breath of faith, will not be spent in vain. Any indulged indolence, or neglect, or unfaithfulness—relaxing our diligence, and keeping back the “whole heart” from God—will indeed never fail to remove the sunshine from the soul. But the blood of Christ still opens the way of return to the backslider, even though he may have wandered, as it were, to the ends of the earth. For “if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thine heart and all

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 3.

² Ephes. ii. 13.

³ Gen. xxxii. 26.

⁴ Rom. v. 1, 2.

⁵ Ib. v. 11.

thy soul."¹ "*A whole heart*" in seeking the Lord is the seal of the Lord's heart in returning to us—"I will rejoice over them"—saith he—"to do them good; and I will plant them in this land assuredly, *with my whole heart and with my whole soul.*"²

Reader! if you are a child of God, *the favour of God* will be to you the "one thing needful."—In other things, you will not venture to choose for yourself; "for who knoweth what is good for man in this life?"³ But in this choice you will be decided. This grand incomparable desire will fill your heart. This will be to you as the portion of ten thousand worlds. Nothing will satisfy besides.

59. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*

THE Psalmist's determination, lately mentioned, to *keep God's word*, was not an hasty impulse, but a considerate resolve, the result of much *thinking on his former ways* of sin and folly. How many on the other hand, seem to pass through the world into eternity without a serious "*thought on their ways!*" Multitudes live for the world—forget God and die! This is their history. What their state is, is written as with a sun-beam in the word of truth—"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and *all the nations that forget God.*"⁴ When no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying—"What have I done?"⁵—this banishing of reflection is the character and ruin of an unthinking world. Perhaps one serious thought might be the new birth of the soul to God—the first step

¹ Deut. iv. 29.

² Jer. xxxii. 41.

³ Eccles. vi. 12.

⁴ Psalm ix. 17.

⁵ Jer. viii. 6.

of the way to heaven. For when a man is arrested by the power of grace, he is as one awaking out of sleep, lost in solemn and serious thought,—‘What am I?’¹ where am I? what have I been? what have I been doing? I have a soul, which is my everlasting all—yet a soul without a Saviour—lost—undone. What is my prospect for its happiness? Behind me is a world of vanity, an empty void. Before me a fearful unknown eternity. Within me an awakened conscience, to remind me of an angry God, and a devouring hell. If I stay here, I perish—If I go forward, I perish—if I go back, and return home to my offended Father, I can but perish.’² The resolution is formed—“I will arise,”³ and fight my way through all difficulties and discouragements to my Father’s house.’—Thus it is more or less distinctly with every prodigal child of God. “He comes to himself;” and this is his first step of return to his God.⁴ This is the whole work of repentance—turning from sin to God. The wanderer *thinks on his own ways, and turns his feet unto the testimonies of his God*; witnessing to his joyful surprise every hinderance removed, the way marked with the blood of his Saviour, and his Father’s smiles in this way welcoming his return homeward. This *turn is the practical exercise of a genuine faith*; and “because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live—he shall not die.”⁵

But this considerate exercise is needed not only

¹ How utterly unmeaning was the celebrated aphorism of antiquity—‘Know thyself’—until explained and illustrated by the light of Revelation!

² Compare 2 Kings vii. 4.

⁴ Ib. 17.

³ Luke xv. 18.

⁵ Ezekiel xviii. 28.

upon the first entrance *into the ways of God*, but in every successive step of our path. It will form the habit of daily “communing with our own heart;”¹ without which disorder and confusion will bewilder our steps. Probably David did not know how far his feet had backslidden from *the ways of his God*, until this serious consideration of his state brought conviction to his soul—so imperceptible is the declining of the heart from God! Nor is it a few transient thoughts or resolutions, that will effect this turn of the heart to God. *A man may maintain a fruitless struggle to return to God for many years in sincerity and earnestness; while the simple act of faith in the power and love of Jesus will at once bring him back.* Thus while “*thinking on his ways,*” let him walk in Christ as the way of return—and he will walk in the way of God’s testimonies with acceptance and delight. In this spirit of simplicity, he will be ready to listen to the first whisper of the convincing voice of the Spirit, which marks the early steps of secret declension from God.² He will also thankfully accept the chastening rod, as the Lord’s appointed instrument of restoring his wandering children to himself. For so prone are they to turn their feet away from the Lord—so continually are they “turning aside like a deceitful bow,”³—and so deaf are they from the constitution of their sinful nature, to the ordinary calls of God, that in love and tender faithfulness to their souls, he often constrained by the stroke of his heavy hand to arrest them in their career of thoughtlessness, and turn them back to himself. Most suitable then for such a state is the prayer of Basil—‘Give me any cross, that may bring me into subjection to thy cross; and save me in spite of myself!’

60. *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

WITH the sincere penitent, no time will be lost between making resolutions and performing them. There is indeed no room for delay. It is a matter of life and death—of eternal life and eternal death.¹ Many a precious soul has been lost by waiting for “a more convenient season”²—a period, which probably may never arrive, and which the wilful neglect of present opportunity provokes God to put far away. At least no time is so acceptable to God as to-day.—To-morrow ruins thousands—To-morrow is another world. “*To-day—while it is called to-day—if ye will hear his voice*”³—“*make haste, and delay not.*” Resolutions, however sincere, and convictions, however serious, will “pass away, as the morning cloud and as the early dew,”⁴ unless they are carefully cherished, and instantly improved. The bonds of iniquity will soon prove too strong for the bonds of your own resolutions; and in the first hour of temptation, convictions, left to chance to grow, will prove as unable to resist the opposition of the enemy, as were the “seven green withs” to bind the giant Samson.⁵ If ever delays are dangerous, much more are they in this concern of eternity. If, therefore, convictions begin to work, instantly yield to their influence. If any worldly or sinful desire is touched, let this be the moment for its crucifixion. If any affection is kindled towards the Saviour, give immediate expression to its voice. If any grace is reviving, let it be called forth into instant duty. This is the

¹ See Deut. xxx. 18.

² Acts xxiv. 25.

³ Heb. iv. 7.

⁴ Hosea vi. 4.

⁵ Judges xvi. 9.

best—the only—expedient to fix and detain the motion of the Spirit now striving in the heart: and who knoweth but the improvement of the present advantage may be the moment of victory over difficulties hitherto found insuperable, and may open the path to heaven with less interruption, and more steady progress?

It is from the neglect of this “*haste*” that convictions often alternately ebb and flow so long before they settle in a sound conversion. Indeed it is this instant movement—“*making haste, and delaying not*”—that marks the principle of the spiritual life. Thus it was with the prodigal. His resolution was no sooner formed than in action. He said—“I will arise and go to my father—and *he arose* and came to his father.”¹ When Matthew heard the voice—“Follow me—*he left all, rose up,* and followed him.”² When Zaccheus was called from the top of the sycamore tree—“*Make haste,* and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house—*he made haste* and came down, and received him joyfully.”³

Ah! as you prize a hope for eternity; as you wish to “flee from the wrath to come,” and to “flee for refuge to the hope set before you”—beware of smothering early convictions. They may prove the first dawn of eternal day upon the soul—the first visit of the quickening spirit to the heart. Guard them with unceasing watchfulness. Nourish them with believing prayer. “Exercise” them “unto” practical “godliness.”⁴ “Quench not the Spirit.”⁵ Let not the spark be extinguished by opposition of the world. Let it not expire for want of the fuel of grace. Let it not lie dormant or inactive. “Stir up the gift of God which

¹ Luke xv. 18—20.

² Ib. v. 27, 28.

³ Ib. xix. 5, 6. Compare also the example of Paul, Gal. i. 15, 16.

⁴ 1 Timothy iv. 7.

⁵ 1 Thess. v. 19.

is in thee.”¹ Every exercise, every motion, adds grace to grace, and increases its vigour, health, and fruitfulness. The more we do, the more we find we can do. The withered hand, whenever stretched forth in obedience to the Saviour’s word, and in dependence on his grace, will never fail of a supply of spiritual strength.² Every successive act strengthens the disposition, until a continued succession has formed the habit of the soul, ready and active for the work of the Lord. Thus the Lord works in setting us to work. Therefore think—determine—turn—“*make haste, and delay not:*” and we wish you “God speed;” “we bless you in the name of the Lord.”³

A word to the believer—Have you any doubts to clear up, any peace to regain in the ways of the Lord? “*Make haste*” to set your heart to the work. *Make haste* to the blood of atonement. Be on the watch to “hear the Shepherd’s voice,”⁴ even if it be the voice of reproof. Promptness is a most important exercise of the habit of faith. Much both of the blessing of conviction, and of the comfortable sense of acceptance, is lost by delay. Much also of the freedom of the Lord’s service is sacrificed to sloth and procrastination. The work that is hard to-day will be harder still to-morrow, by the resistance of this day’s convictions. A greater cost of self-denial, a heavier burden of sorrow, and increasing unfitness for the service of God, will be the issue of delay. Be continually, therefore, looking for some beam of light to descend, and some influence of grace to flow in upon you from your exalted Head. A simple and vigorous faith will quickly enliven you with that love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, readiness to work, and cheerfulness to

¹ 2 Timothy i. 6.

² Mark iii. 5.

³ Psalm cxxix. 8.

⁴ John x. 27.

suffer, which will once again make the ways of God "pleasantness and peace" to your soul.

61. *The bands of the wicked have robbed me; but I have not forgotten thy law.*

It will not be long before our resolution to *keep the commandments of God* will be put to the test. Some trial will either prove our insincerity, or strengthen our determination, and realize to us the full support of a faithful and consistent profession. Few of us, perhaps, have literally known the trial of David.¹ But the lesson to be learnt from his frame of mind under it is of great importance to all, who profess to have their "treasure in heaven." It teaches us, that only exercised faith will sustain us in the time of trouble. This faith will enable us instantly to recollect our heavenly portion, and to assure our interest in it, in a remembrance of the law of our God. Had David "*forgotten God's law,*" no other resource of comfort opened before him. But it was ready—substantiating to his mind "the things that were not seen and eternal."² Look again at the Apostle's deliberate estimate of this very trial—not only bearing his loss, but absolutely forgetting it in the enjoyment of his better portion. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, *for whom I have suffered the loss of all things; and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.*"³

The temper of mind under such trials as this serves indeed most clearly to discover the real bent of the heart. If we are in possession of a spiritual and hea-

¹ See 1 Sam. xxx. 1—3.

² 2 Cor. iv. 18. Heb. xi. 1.

³ Phil. iii. 8.

venly portion, we shall bear to be "*robbed by the bands of the wicked,*" and yet, "hold fast our profession." David, under this calamity, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God."¹ Job under the same visitation, "fell down upon the ground and worshipped."² The mercies indeed we lose are but as a feather compared with the mercies which we retain. The prospects of the children of God (not to speak of their present privileges) effectually secure them from ultimate loss, even in the spoiling of their worldly all.³ Thus the early Christians suffered "*the bands of the wicked to rob them*"—taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods; *knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.*"⁴ We have indeed little reason to be frightened from religion by the anticipation of its trials. In making exchange of the world for God, and the services of sin for the ways of heaven, we shall find no room left for regret in life, in death, or in eternity. The darkest hour of the believer is ten thousand times brighter than the brightest day of the ungodly. The hope of the crown will enable us to bear the cross, and to realize its sanctifying support as a matter for unbounded praise.

But how desolate are the poor votaries of the world in the hour of trouble! Ignorant of the all-sufficiency of the refuge of the gospel; instead of being driven to it by the gracious visitations of God, they would rather retreat into any hiding-place of their own, than direct their steps backward to him. Their circumstances of distress are most intensely aggravated by the sullen rebellion of the heart, which refuses to listen to those breathings of the Saviour's love, that would guide them to himself, as their sure, and peace-

¹ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

² Job i. 13—17, 20.

³ See Mark x. 29, 30.

⁴ Hebrews x. 34.

ful, and eternal rest!¹ Would that we could persuade them to cast their souls in penitence and faith before his blessed cross!² The burden of sin, as Bunyan's pilgrim found, would then drop from their backs. And this burden once removed—other burdens before intolerable would be found comparatively light; nay—all burdens would be removed in the enjoyment of the Christian privilege of casting all—sin—care—and trouble—upon Jesus. Contrast the state of destitution without him, with the abundant resources of the people of God. They are in the present possession of a “joy which no man taketh from them;”³ and they have “laid up treasure in heaven,” where *the bands of the wicked* can “never break through, nor steal.”⁴

Christian! Does not your faith realize a subsistence of things not seen? The only realities in the apprehension of the world are “the things that are seen, and are temporal.” Your realities are “the things that are not seen, and are eternal.” Then remember—if you be *robbed* of your earthly all, your treasure is beyond the reach of harm. You still are able to say—“I have all and abound.”⁵ You can live splendidly upon your God, though all is beggary around you. The remembrance of the law of your God is an unfailing stay to your soul, and you are ready to acknowledge—“*Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.*”⁶

¹ See Matthew xi. 28.

³ John xvi. 22.

⁵ Phil. iv. 18; also 2 Cor. vi. 10.

² 1 Peter v. 7.

⁴ Matt. vi. 20.

⁶ Verse 92.

62. *At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee :
because of thy righteous judgments.*

ANOTHER exercise of sacred pleasure in the Lord, and in his ways! His *portion* was always satisfying to this holy man, and he was daily feeding upon it with fresh delight. There was no occasion for the painful restrictions and mortifications of a monastery to oblige him to self-denying observances. Much less was there any desire, by these extraordinary services, to work out a righteousness of his own, to recommend him to the favour of God. His diligence in this heavenly work was the spontaneous effusion of a heart "filled with the Spirit."¹ "Seven times a day"² was not enough for him; but he must "*rise at midnight*" to continue his song of praise. These hours sometimes had been spent in overwhelming sorrow.³ Now they were given to the privileged employment of praise. Indeed it seems to have been his frequent custom to stir up his gratitude by a *midnight* review of the Lord's daily manifestations of mercy.⁴ A most exciting example—especially for the child of sorrow, when "wearisome nights are appointed to him," and he "is full of tossings, and fro unto the dawning of the day!"⁵ Thus "let the saints be joyful in glory; *let them sing aloud upon their beds.*"⁶ Under circumstances of outward trial, we find a similar picture of this Christian enjoyment. When "*at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God;*"⁷ *they gave thanks because of his righteous judgments.*

¹ Ephesians v. 18.

³ See Psalm lxxvii. 3, 4.

⁵ Job vii. 3, 4.

⁶ Psalm cxlix. 5.

² See verse 164.

⁴ Ib. cxxxix. 17, 18.

⁷ Acts xvi. 25.

We often complain of our want of spirituality in the Divine life—how much our body hinders the ascent of the soul heavenwards—how often drowsiness overcomes our evening communion with our God; the “weakness of the flesh” overpowering the “willingness of the Spirit.”¹ But, after making all due allowances for constitutional infirmity, it may be well to inquire, how far we are “instant in season and out of season” in the mortification of the flesh.² Do we earnestly seek for a heart delighting in heavenly things? The more the flesh is denied for the service of God, the more we shall be elevated for the enjoyment, and realize the privilege, of the work; and, instead of having so often to mourn that our “souls cleave unto the dust,”³ we shall “mount upwards with eagles’ wings,”⁴ and even now by anticipation, take our place before “the throne of God and the Lamb.” Such is the active influence of self-denial in exercising our graces, and promoting our comfort! Oh! how much more fervent would be our prayers—how much more fruitful in blessings—were they enlivened with more abundant delight in the ‘angelical work of praise.’⁵ The theme is always before us. The subject of the heavenly song should constantly engage our songs on earth—Jesus and his love—the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain—his “power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”⁶ Midnight wakefulness would be far sweeter than slumber; yea, night itself would be turned to day, did “*the judgments of God,*” as manifested in the glory of the Saviour, thus occupy our hearts.⁷ Lord, tune my heart to thy praise, and then no time will be

¹ Matthew xxvi. 41.

² Verse 25.

⁵ Baxter.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

⁴ Isaiah xl. 31.

⁶ Rev. v. 12.

⁷ See Ib. xv. 3, 4.

unseasonable for this blessed employment. Time thus redeemed from sleep will be an antepast of the unwearied service of heaven.”¹

63. *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.*

THOSE that love the Lord's service naturally associate with kindred spirits—with those that *fear him, and keep his precepts.*² These two features identify the same character; as cheerful obedience is always the fruit of filial fear. These then are the Lord's people; and union with him is in fact union with them. It may be, that sometimes the society of the more refined and intelligent of this world may be more congenial to our natural taste. But ought there not to be a restraint here? Ought not the Christian to say—“Surely the fear of God is not in this place;”³ and “should I love them that hate the Lord?”⁴ Let those of us, who live in close, and to a certain degree necessary, contact with the world, subject their hearts to an evening scrutiny on this subject. ‘Has the society of this day refreshed my soul, or raised my heart to spiritual things? Has it promoted a watchful temper? Or has it not rather “quenched the spirit” of prayer, and thrown me back from intercourse with God?’ To meet the Christian in ordinary courtesy, *not in unity of heart*, is a sign of an unspiritual walk with God. Fellowship with God is “walking in the light.” “Fellowship one with another” is the natural flow—“the communion of saints”—the fruit and effect of communion with God.⁵

¹ Rev. iv. 8.

² Compare Psalm ciii. 17, 18.

³ Gen. xx. 11.

⁴ 2 Chron. xix. 2.

⁵ See 1 John i. 3—7.

The calls of duty, or the leadings of providence, may bring us indeed into unavoidable connexion with those who "have no fear of God before their eyes." Nor are we called to affect a sullen or uncourteous¹ habit in our attempts to draw their consideration to religion. But such men, whatever be their attractions, will not be the companions of our choice. To feel fellowship with them, is to "remove the ancient land-mark;"² to forget the broad line of separation between us and them; and to venture into the atmosphere of most imminent danger. If indeed our hearts were ascending, like a flame of fire, with a natural motion heavenwards, and carrying with them all in their way, the choice of the companions of our pilgrimage would be a matter of little importance. But so deadening to our spirit is the conversation of the men of this world, (however commanding their talents, or interesting their topics,) that even, if we have been just before enlivened by the high privilege of communion with God, the free and self-indulgent interchange of their society will benumb our spiritual powers, and quickly freeze them again. To underrate therefore the privileged association with "*them that fear God,*" is to incur—not only a most awful responsibility in the sight of God—but also a most serious hazard to our own souls.

If then we are not ashamed to confess ourselves Christians, let us not shrink from walking in fellowship with Christians. Even if they should exhibit some repulsive features of character, they bear the image of him, whom we profess to love inexpressibly and incomparably above all. They will be our companions in an eternal home: they ought therefore to be our brothers now. How sweet, and holy, and heavenly

¹ See 1 Peter iii. 8.

² Proverbs xxii. 28.

is this near relation to them in our common Lord! Those who have enjoyed their communion will readily consent to his judgment, who pronounced “the righteous to be more excellent than his neighbour.”¹ “Iron sharpeneth iron.”² If then “the iron be blunt,” this will be one of the best means of “whetting the edge.”³ The most established servants of God gladly acknowledge the sensible refreshment derived from this union of heart.⁴ It is marked in the word of God, as the channel of the communication of heavenly wisdom⁵—as a feature in the character of the citizens of Zion⁶—and as that disposition, which is distinguished with manifest tokens of the Saviour’s presence;⁷ and which the great day will crown with the special seal of his remembrance—“They *that feared the Lord* spake often one to another; and the Lord *hearkened and heard*” it; “and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they *shall be mine*, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day, when I make up my jewels.”⁸

64. *The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy; teach me thy statutes.*

WHAT a picture does the earth present on every side—a world of rebels! yet a world “*full of the mercy of the Lord!*” How refreshing is the prospect to a spiritual eye! What an excitement to praise!—“O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all. The earth is full of thy riches.

¹ Prov. xii. 26.

² Ib. xxvii. 17.

³ See Eccl. x. 10.

⁴ Compare Acts xxviii. 15. Romans i. 11, 12. 2 Cor. vii. 6, 7.

⁵ Proverbs xiii. 20.

⁶ Psalm xv. 1, 4. Comp. Psalm xvi. 3, and especially 1 John iii. 14.

⁷ Luke xxiv. 15, 32.

⁸ Malachi iii. 16, 17.

The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”¹ And how does the contemplation of the Lord’s “*mercy*” in providence encourage our faith, in the expectancy of spiritual privileges!—“O Lord! thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! *therefore* the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wing. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.”² ‘As thou dost largely bestow thy blessings upon all creatures according to their nature and condition, so I do desire the spiritual blessings of the lively light of thy law and word, which are fitting and convenient for the being and happiness of my soul.’³ As an ignorant sinner,—“what I see not, teach thou me.”⁴ “*Teach me thy statutes*”—that which thou hast appointed, as the way of duty, and the path to glory—that path which I am utterly unable to discover, or when discovered, to walk in, without the help of thy grace. And indeed the hearts of his people are the vessels, into which the Lord is continually pouring more and more of himself, until they shall “be filled with all the fulness of God.”⁵ Every good, according to its character and degree, is diffusive. And thus the goodness or *mercy of God* is represented as pervading the whole universe of his crea-

¹ Psalm civ. 24; cxlv. 15, 16.

² Ib. xxxvi. 6-8.

³ Diodati. ‘It is worthy of special notice, how often, and in what varied connections, David in this Psalm prays to be taught the statutes of God, though he seems to have been more intimately acquainted with the sacred oracles, as then extant, than almost any other man; but he knew that Divine teaching alone could enable him rightly to understand the Scriptures, and to apply general rules to all the variety of particular cases, which occurred in the course of his life.—*Scott*.

⁴ Job xxxiv. 32.

⁵ Eph. iii. 19.

tion, and more especially filling the hearts of his people. It is natural, plentiful—free—communicative.¹

Yet none but a believer will understand how to use the plea which is here employed. The *mercy* that he sees on every side, is to him a pledge and earnest of that *mercy*, which his soul needs within. The world indeed in its present fallen state, when seen through the medium of pride and discontent, exhibits a picture of misery, not of mercy; and only ministers occasion for complaint against the Creator. But the believer—feeling the infinite and eternal desert of sin—cannot but know that the lowest exercise of goodness in God is an act of free undeserved mercy. No wonder then that he sees mercy in every thing—in every part of the universe of God—a world “*full of mercy.*” The very food we eat, our raiment, our habitations, the contrivances for our comfort, are not mere displays of goodness, but manifestations of mercy. Having forfeited all claim upon the smallest consideration of God, there could have been no just ground of complaint, had all these blessings been made occasions of suffering, instead of comfort and indulgence.

And then the question naturally recurs, and to a spiritual mind will never weary by its recurrence—Whence flows all this mercy? Oh! it is delightful indeed to answer such an inquiry—delightful to contemplate him, “in whom” we are not only “blessed with all spiritual blessings;”² but who is also the medium, through which our temporal comforts are conveyed to us. How sweet to eye these mercies, as bought with the most precious blood that ever was known in the world, and to mark the print of the nails of our crucified friend stamped upon the least of them!

¹ Verse 68.

² Ephesians i. 3.

We allow it to add a relish to our enjoyments, that we can consider them as provided by some beloved friend; and should not our mercies be doubly sweet in the remembrance of that munificent Friend, who purchased them for us so dearly; who bestows them upon us so richly; yea, who gives himself with them all?

Have we heard of this mercy of God? And do we feel the need of it for ourselves—for every moment? Then let us apply to the throne of grace in the free and open way of acceptance and access. Let us go to the King (as Benhadad's servants to the king of Israel ¹) in the spirit of self-condemnation and faith. Our acceptance does not depend (as in the case referred to) upon a "peradventure;" but it rests upon the sure word of promise—"Him that cometh to me, *I will in no wise cast out.*" ²

¹ Compare 1 Kings xx. 31.

² John vi. 37.

PART IX.

65: *Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.*

PERHAPS David is here acknowledging the Lord's answer to his prayer — "*Deal bountifully with thy servant.*"¹ "*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.*" And who among us has not daily reason to make the same acknowledgment? Even in those trials, when we have indulged hard thoughts of God, a clearer view of his judgments, and a more simple dependence upon his faithfulness and love, will rebuke our impatience and unbelief, and encourage our trust.² Subsequent experience altered Jacob's hasty view of the Lord's dealings with him. In a moment of peevishness, the recollection of the supposed death of a beloved son, and the threatened bereavement of another, tempted him to say—"*All these things are against me.*"³ At a brighter period of his day, when clouds are beginning to disperse, we hear that "the spirit of Jacob revived. And Jacob said, *It is enough; Joseph my*

¹ Verse 17.

² "If all the sad losses, trials, sicknesses, infirmities, griefs, heaviness, and inconstancy of the creature be expounded to be, as I am sure they are, the rods of the jealousy of a Father in heaven, contending with all your lovers on earth, though there were millions of them, for your love, to fetch it home to heaven, single, unmixed, you will forgive (if we may use that word) every rod of God, and "let not the sun go down upon your wrath" against any messenger of your afflicting and correcting Father."—*Rutherford's Letters*.

³ Genesis xlii. 36.

son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die.”¹ And when his evening sun was going down almost without a cloud, in the believing act of “blessing the sons of” his beloved “Joseph,”² how clearly does he retract the language of his former sinful impatience!—“God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk—the God which fed me all my life long, unto this day—the *Angel which redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads.”³ This surely was in the true spirit of the acknowledgment—*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.*

And how is it that any of us have ever harboured a suspicion of unbelief? Has God in any one instance falsified his promise? Has “the vision” failed to come at the end? Has it ever “lied?”⁴ Has he not “confirmed his promise by an oath,” “that we might have two immutable things” as the ground of “*strong consolation?*”⁵ Any degree less than *the full credit* that he deserves, is admitting the false principle, that God is a man that he should lie, and the son of man that he should repent. It weakens the whole spiritual frame, shakes our grasp of the promise, destroys our present comfort, and brings foreboding apprehensions of the future. Whereas, if we have faith and patience to wait, “in the mount the Lord shall be seen.”⁶ “All things” may seem to be “against us,” at the very time, when under the wonder-working hand of God they are “working together for our good.”⁷ When we “are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” and we discover a “needs be” for it all, and the trial of faith is found unto “praise and honour and glory”⁸—have we not cause to say—

¹ Gen. xlv. 27, 28.

³ Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

⁵ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

⁷ Rom. viii. 28.

² Heb. xi. 21.

⁴ Hab. ii. 3.

⁶ Gen. xxii. 14. See Scott in loco.

⁸ 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

“*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord!*” And when we begin to reap “the peaceable fruit of righteousness,”¹ from the discipline of our Father’s school, must we not put a fresh seal to our testimony? But why should the believer delay his acknowledgment, till he comes out of his trial? Ought he not to give it even in the midst of his “heaviness?”² The power of faith has enabled many, and would enable him, to “glorify God in the fires;”³ to “trust” him, even when “walking in darkness, and having no light;”⁴ and, even while smarting under his chastening rod, to acknowledge, that he “*has dealt well with him.*”

But if he doubts the reasonableness of this acknowledgment, then let him, while suffering under trial, endeavour to take up different language. ‘Lord, thou hast dealt ill with thy servant; thou hast not kept thy word.’ If in a moment of unbelief his impatient heart, like Jacob’s, could harbour such a dishonourable suspicion, his conscience would soon smite him with conviction—‘What! shall I, who am “called out of darkness into marvellous light”—shall I, who am rescued from slavery and death, and brought into a glorious state of liberty and life, complain? Shall I—who have been redeemed at so great a price, and who have a right to “all the promises of God in Christ Jesus,”⁵ and who am now an “heir of God, and joint heir with Christ”⁶—murmur at my Father’s will? Alas, that my heart should prove so foolish—so weak—so ungrateful! Lord! I would acknowledge

¹ Hebrews xii. 11.

² Verses 71, 75. “In every thing (*therefore including affliction*) by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving, &c.* Phil. iv. 6. Compare also 1 Thess. v. 18.

³ Isaiah xxiv. 15.

⁴ Isaiah i. 10.

⁵ 2 Cor. i. 20.

⁶ Rom. viii. 17.

with thankfulness, and yet with humiliation—“*Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, according to thy word.*” But if these acknowledgments are honourable to God, and supporting to our own faith, how many sweet occasions of calling to mind the Lord’s mercies are lost by our own neglect! Were we habitually to mark them for future remembrance, we should be surprised to see how their numbers would multiply, till we were ready say,—“If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.”¹ And truly such recollections would come up as a sweet savour to God “by Christ Jesus;”² while they would serve to enhance every common, as well as every special mercy—“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and *all that is within me* bless his holy name; and forget not all his benefits.”³

66. *Teach me good judgment and knowledge; for I have believed thy commandments.*

IF the perception of the Lord’s merciful dealings with my soul is obscure—*Teach me good judgment and knowledge.* Give me a clear and enlarged apprehension, that I may be ready with my acknowledgment—that *all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.*⁴ Or even with an enlightened assurance of the Lord’s wise and faithful dispensations, still would I urge this petition before my God, as needful for every step of my path: Indeed this prayer illustrates the simplicity and the intelligent character of Christian faith—always desiring, asking, and expecting the most suitable blessings. For what blessings

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 18.

² Hebrews xiii. 15.

³ Psalm ciii. 1, 2.

⁴ Psalm xxv. 10, with cxix. 65.

can be more suitable to an ignorant sinner, than *good judgment and knowledge*; “*knowledge*” of ourselves, of our Saviour, of the way of obedience—and “*good judgment*,” to direct and apply this knowledge to some valuable end? These two parts of our intellectual furniture have a most important connexion and dependence upon each other. “*Knowledge*” is the speculative perception of general truth. “*Judgment*” is the practical application of it to the heart and conduct. No school, but the school of Christ—no teaching, but the teaching of the Spirit—can ever give this “*good judgment and knowledge*.” Solomon asks it for himself—Paul for his people.² Both direct us to God as the sole fountain and author.³ Much indeed do we need this teaching influence in the study of the word of God. In a field of such vast extent we should not satisfy ourselves with a narrow compass; but should be grasping a distinct and extended survey of those truths, which are so intimately connected with our Christian establishment and privilege. Much perplexing doubt, discouragement and fear; much mistaken apprehension of important truth, much coldness

¹ 1 Kings iii. 9.

² Phil. i. 9, 10. Col. i. 9.

³ Prov. ii. 6. 1 Cor. i. 5. 2 Tim. i. 7. It is recorded of one of the Reformers, that, when he had acquitted himself in a public disputation with great credit to his Master's cause, a friend begged to see the notes, which he had been observed to write, supposing that he had taken down the arguments of his opponents, and sketched the substance of his own reply. Greatly was he surprised to find that his notes consisted simply of these ejaculatory petitions—‘More light, Lord,—more light,—more light!’ And how fully was the true spirit of prayer compressed and illustrated in these short aspirations! Could they fail of success? “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James i. 5. Greenhem, being asked his judgment of some important matters, answered—‘Sir, neither am I able to speak, nor you to hear; for we have not prayed. I may indeed talk, and you may answer, as natural men; but we are not now prepared to confer as children of God.’ Works, p. 19.

and backsliding of heart and conduct, arises from the want of an accurate and full view of the Scriptural system.

This prayer has a special application to the tender and sensitive child of God. The disease of his constitution is too often a scrupulous conscience—one of the most active and successful enemies to his settled peace and quietness.¹ The faculty of conscience partakes with every other power of man of the injury of the fall; and therefore, with all its intelligence, honesty, and power, is liable to misconception. Like a defect of vision, it often displaces objects: and, in apparently conflicting duties, that which touches the feeling, or accords with the temper, is preferred to one, which, though more remotely viewed, really possessed a higher claim. Thus it pronounces its verdict from the predominance of feeling, rather than from the exercise of judgment—more from an indistinct perception of the subject presented to the mind, than from a simple immediate reference “to the law and testimony.” Again—matters of trivial moment are often insisted upon, to the neglect of important principles.² External points of offence are more considered, than the habitual mortification of the inward principle. Conformity to the world in dress and appearance is marked with stronger censure, than the general spirit

¹ ‘Scruple’—as Bishop Taylor tersely observes—is a little stone in the foot. If you set it on the ground, it hurts you. If you hold it up you cannot go forward. It is a trouble, when trouble is over; a doubt, when doubts are resolved; a little party behind the hedge, when the main army is broken and cleared; and when conscience is instructed in its way, and girt for action, a light trifling reason, or an absurd fear, hinders it from beginning the journey, or proceeding in the way, or resting at the journey’s end. *Duct. Dubitant.* Book I. chap. vi. See Calvin’s lively description of scrupulosity in Scott’s *Analysis of his Institutes.*—Continuation of Milner, iii. 563.

² Col. ii. 18.

of worldliness in the temper and conduct of *outward non-conformists*; while *the spirit of separation from the world (which may exist in a somewhat wider range of Christian liberty, than the narrow perception of some professors has conceived,*¹) is totally disregarded. Thus are non-essentials often confounded with fundamentals—things indifferent with things unlawful, from a narrow misconception of what is directly forbidden and allowed.² Conscience therefore cannot be safely trusted without the light of the word of God; and most important is the prayer—“*Teach me good judgment and knowledge.*”

The exercises of this state of feeling are both endless and causeless. In the well-intended endeavour to guard against a devious track, the mind is constantly harassed with an over-anxious inquiry, whether the right path is accurately discovered; and thus at once the pleasure and the progress of the journey are materially hindered. The influence therefore of this morbid sensibility is strenuously to be resisted. It renders the strait way more strait. It retards the work of grace in the soul. It is usually connected with self-righteousness. It savours of, and tends to produce, hard thoughts of God. It damps our cheerfulness in his service, and unfits us for the duty of the present moment. What however is more than all to be deprecated, is, that it multiplies sin; or, to speak more clearly, it superinduces another species of sin, besides the actual transgression of the law of God. For opposition to the dictates of conscience in any particular is sin, even though the act itself may be allowed by the law of God. We may therefore sin in the act of doing good, or in obedience to the liberty

¹ See 1 Cor. viii. 4, 7.

² ‘Measuring actions by atoms is the way—not to govern, but to disorder, conscience.’—*Bishop Taylor, ut supra.*

and enjoyment of the gospel, as well as in the allowed transgression of the sacred law. Indeed under the bondage of scrupulous conscience we seem to be entangled in the sad necessity of sinning. The *dictates of conscience, even when grounded upon misconception, are authoritative.*¹ Listening to its suggestions may be sinning against the liberty, wherewith Christ has made us "free," and in which we are commanded to "stand fast."² No human authority can free from its bonds. Resistance to its voice is disobedience to God's vicegerent, and therefore, *in a qualified sense at least,* disobedience to God himself. And thus sin is committed, even when that which conscience condemns may be innocent.³

The evil of a scrupulous conscience may often be traced to a diseased temperament of body, to a naturally weak or perverted understanding, to the unfavourable influence of early prejudice—to a want of simple exercise of faith, or perception of the matters of faith. In these cases faith may be sincere, though weak; and the sin, such as it is, is a sin of infirmity, calling for our pity, forbearance, prayer, and help. In many instances, however, wilful ignorance, false shame that will not inquire, or a pertinacious adherence to deep-rooted opinion, is the source of the disease. Now such persons must be roused, even at the hazard of wounding the conscience of the more tenderly scrupulous. But as the one class decidedly sin,

¹ See Romans xiv. 14. "To him *that esteemeth any thing to be unclean* (though clean by the express appointment of God," Acts x. 9—15, 1 Tim. iv. 3—5, and only "*unclean*" therefore by the *misconception of conscience*) "*to him it is unclean*"—i. e.—*he must not touch it upon the ground of conscience*—though the gospel allowed the use of it, and it was an infringement of Christian liberty to abstain from it. Thus did his ignorance make to himself an occasion of sin.

² Gal. v. 1, with iv. 9, 10.

³ Compare Rom. xiv. 20—23.

and the other too frequently indulge their infirmity, the excitement will probably be ultimately useful to both. Both need to have the conscience enlightened; and to obtain “a right judgment in all things”—by a more diligent “search in the Scriptures”—by “seeking the law at the mouth of the priest”¹—and, above all, by earnest prayer with the Psalmist—“*Teach me good judgment and knowledge.*” Thus they will discern between what is imperative, and what is indifferent: what is lawful, and what is expedient. If “whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” then the only prospect of the removal of the doubt will be increase of faith—that is, a more full persuasion of the Divine warrant and instruction.² “Howbeit there is not in every one this knowledge;”³ yet the exhortation speaks alike to all—“Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁴ Indeed the most favourable symptoms of scrupulosity (except where the disease originates in external causes) partake of the guilt of wilful ignorance; because none can strictly be said sincerely to ask for “*good judgment and knowledge,*” who do not diligently improve all means of obtaining it. If therefore, the scrupulous shrink from honestly seeking the resolution of their difficulties in private conferences (where they are to be had) with ministers or experienced Christians, so far they must be considered as wilfully ignorant. We would indeed “receive them”—“bear with their infirmities,”⁵ and encourage them to expect relief from their hard bondage in the way of increasing diligence, humility, and prayer. While their minds are

¹ Mal. ii. 7. See the example of the primitive church. Acts xv. 1, 2.

² Romans xiv. 5.

⁴ 2 Peter iii. 18.

³ 1 Cor. viii. 7.

⁵ Rom. xiv. 1; xv. 1.

in doubt concerning the path of duty, their actions must be imperfect and unsatisfactory. Let them therefore wait, inquire, and pray, until their way be made plain. Having done this, let them act according to their conscience, allowing nothing that it condemns, neglecting nothing which it requires. ¹The responsibility of error, (should error be eventually detected) will not be—the too implicit following of the guidance of conscience—but the want of due care and diligence for its more clear illumination. Generally, however, the rule will apply,—“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” ¹

But, *besides the scrupulous conscience, the imperfectly enlightened conscience* presents a case equally to be deprecated. Often does it charge the incessant variations of feeling to a sinful source, when they have really originated in bodily indisposition, or accidental influence of temptation. Sins of infirmity are confounded with sins of indulgence; occasional with habitual transgressions of duty. Only a part of the character is brought under cognizance; and while short comings or surprisals are justly condemned; yet the influence of contrition, faith, love, and watchfulness, is passed by unnoticed. Thus the gospel becomes the very reverse of the appointment of its gracious Author.² It brings ashes for beauty, mourning for the oil of joy, and the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise. If this evil is “not a sin unto death,” it is “a sore evil under the sun,” which may

¹ Matthew vi. 22. Compare Prov. xxiv. 5. For a similar view of this case, see Baxter's Christian Directory, Book i. chap. iii. The sacrifices appointed for sins of ignorance under the law, (Lev. iv.) mark God's sense of this case: while the frequent breaches of Christian unity and forbearance arising from it may well justify this extended consideration of it.

² Compare Isaiah lxi. 3.

often give occasion for the prayer—“*Teach me good judgment and knowledge;*” that, in the simplicity of faith, I may be blessed with a tender conscience, and be delivered from the bondage of a scrupulous, and from the perplexity of an unenlightened conscience. Let my heart never condemn me where it ought not. Let it never fail to condemn me where it ought.

But alas! the perception of our need of this “*good judgment and knowledge,*” is far too indistinct and uninfluential. We need to cry for these valuable blessings with deeper earnestness, and more diligent and patient waiting upon God. Divine wisdom is a treasury, that does not spend by giving: and we may ask to be enriched to the utmost extent of our wants, “in full assurance of faith.” But this faith embraces the whole revelation of God—the *commandments as well as the promises*. And thus it becomes the principle of Christian obedience. For can we *believe these commandments* to be as they are represented—“holy, just, and good, and not delight in them?”¹ “In those is continuance,” saith the prophet, “and we shall be saved.”² Convinced of their perfection, acknowledging their obligations, loving them and living in them, we shall “come to full age” in the knowledge of the Gospel, and, “by reason of use have our senses exercised to discern good and evil.”³

67. *Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.*

THE exercise of *good judgment and knowledge* will lead us to deprecate, instead of desiring, a prosperous state. Its seductive temptations and the too

¹ Rom. vii. 12, with 22.

² Isaiah lxiv. 5.

³ Heb. v. 14.

successful hindrances, which it offers to our progress, render the condition far more to be dreaded than to be envied. Should the Christian, by the appointment of God, be thrown into this atmosphere of danger, he will feel the prayer that is so often put into his lips most peculiarly expressive of his need.—“*In all time of our wealth—Good Lord! deliver us!*”¹ A time of wealth is indeed a time of special need—such mighty power does it give to Satan’s temptations, while at the same time it weakens our perception of their power! Many and afflicting are the instances recorded of its baneful influence on the Lord’s people,² while its unmitigated curse in the experience of the ungodly is written as with a sunbeam for our warning—“When Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked—I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear.”³ But how awful will be the period, when the question shall speak to the conscience with all the poignancy of self-conviction—“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?” What is the end of this flowery path? “Death!”⁴ “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors!”⁵ “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.”⁶

Our Saviour’s allotment for his people—“In the world ye shall have tribulation”⁷—marks not less his wisdom than his love. This is the gracious rod,

¹ Litany.

² The histories of David, 1 Chron. xxi. 1—4; Solomon, 1 Kings xi. 1—8; Uzziah, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; and Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxxii. 25—32, will readily occur to the mind.

³ Deut. xxxii. 15. Jer. xxii. 21.

⁴ Rom. vi. 21.

⁵ Psalm lxxiii. 18, 19.

⁶ Prov. i. 32.

⁷ John xvi. 33. Acts xiv. 22. 1 Thess. iii. 3.

by which he scourges back his prodigal children to himself. This is the wise discipline, by which he preserves them from the poisoned sweetness of carnal allurements, and keeps their hearts in a simple direction towards himself, as the well-spring of their everlasting joy. With all of them this one method has been pursued. All have been taught in one school. All have known the power of affliction in some of its varied forms of inward conflict or outward trouble; and the experience, derived from this source, has given abundant evidence, that the pains bestowed upon them have not been in vain. “*Now*” is each of them ready to say—“*Now have I kept thy word.*” I never prized it before. I could indeed scarcely be said to know it. I never understood its comfort, until affliction expounded it to me. I never till now saw its suitableness to my case.’ Thus it was with Manasseh, “when in affliction he besought the Lord, and humbled himself greatly before the Lord God of his fathers.”¹ Thus also in afflictions the Lord “heard Ephraim bemoaning himself.”² The same eye, under the same circumstances, now beheld Israel “seeking him early,”³ and the forlorn wandering child casting a wishful, penitent look towards his Father’s house, as if the sinful pleasures, that had enticed his heart from home, were now embittered to his soul.⁴

But what an heightened aggravation of guilt, when these especial and choicest mercies fail of their gracious end—when vanity, worldliness, and sin reign as before with uncontrolled sway! Ah! when sinners are unhumbled “under the mighty hand of God”—

¹ 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. Compare Daniel iv. 36, 37.

² Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

³ Hosea v. 15; vi. 1, 2.

⁴ Luke xv. 16, 17.

when they are afflicted, and not purged by affliction—when it is said of them—“ They received not correction ”¹—it seems to be the forerunner of that tremendous judgment—“ Why should ye be stricken any more.”²

Heavenly Father! keep thy poor weak erring child from this fearful doom. Let not that measure of prosperity, which thou mayest be pleased to vouchsafe, prove my curse. But especially let every cross, every affliction, which thou art pleased to mingle in my cup, conform me more to my Saviour’s image, restrain my heart from its daily wanderings, endear thy holy ways and word to my soul, and give me sweeter anticipations of that blessed home, where I shall never wander more, but find my eternal happiness in “ *keeping thy word.*”

68. *Thou art good and doest good; teach me thy statutes.*

THE blessed effects³ of chastisement, as a special instance of the Lord’s goodness, might naturally lead to an acknowledgment of his general goodness, in his own character, and in his unwearied dispensations of love. Judging in unbelieving haste of his providential and gracious dealings, feeble sense imagines a frown, when the eye of faith discerns a smile, upon his face; and therefore in proportion as faith is exercised in the review of the past, and the experience of the present, we shall be prepared with the ascription of praise—“ *Thou art good.*” This is the true and genuine character of God. He is good—He is goodness. Good in himself—good in his essence—good in the

¹ Zeph. iii. 2.

² Isaiah i. 5.

highest degree. All the names of God are comprehended in this one of "*Good.*"¹ All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names according to the object it is exercised about. When he confers happiness without merit, it is grace. When he bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy. When he bears with provoking rebels, it is long-suffering. When he performs his promise, it is truth. When he commiserates a distressed person, it is pity. When he supplies an indigent person, it is bounty. When he succours an innocent person, it is righteousness. And when he pardons a penitent person, it is mercy. All summed up in this one name—Goodness. None so communicatively good as God. As the notion of God includes goodness, so the notion of goodness includes diffusiveness. Without goodness he would cease to be a Deity; and without diffusiveness he would cease to be good. The being good is necessary to the being God. For goodness is nothing else in the notion of it but a strong inclination to do good, either to find or to make an object, wherein to exercise itself, according to the propension of its own nature. And it is an inclination of communicating itself, not for its own interest, but for the good of the object it pitcheth upon. Thus God is good by nature; and his nature is not without activity. He acts conveniently with his own nature. "*Thou art good, and doest good.*"²

¹ The revelation of the "goodness" of God was made to Moses in direct answer to his prayer—"I beseech thee, show me thy glory"—evidently marking his "goodness" to be not a single attribute, or a display of any particular feature of the Divine character, but rather to consist in the combined exercise of all his perfections. Exodus xxxiii. 18, 19, with xxxiv. 5—7.

² Charnock's Works, vol. i. 581, 585, 588. For another exquisite view (parallel, and in some degree identical, with Charnock) of this

How easily is such an acknowledgment excited towards an earthly friend! Yet who has not daily cause to complain of the coldness and languor of his affections towards his God? It would be a sweet morning's reflection to recollect some of the innumerable instances, in which the goodness of God has been most distinctly marked; to trace them in their peculiar application to our own need; and above all to mark, not only the source from which they come, but the channel through which they flow. A view of covenant love does indeed make the goodness of God to shine with inexpressible brightness "in the face of Jesus Christ;"¹ and often when the heart is conscious of backsliding, does the contemplation of this "*goodness*" under the influence of the Spirit, prove the Divinely-appointed means of "leading us to repentance."²

But praise will always give encouragement to prayer. "*Thou art good, and doest good.*" Then give me the good I need—Give me this instance of thy goodness—"Teach me thy statutes." Thus should our views of the goodness of God establish our habit of dependence upon him for every needful blessing, and among the rest, for the blessing of Divine teaching, which indeed is connected with this feature of his character.³ Twice before had the Psalmist sent up this prayer and plea.⁴ Yet, though probably the carnal taste may be weary of the repetition, he seems to make the supplication ever new by the freshness and vehemency of his desires. And let me ever make it new by the remembrance of that one display of goodness, which casts every other manifestation

'perfecting perfection, which crowns and consummates all the rest.'—See Howe's Works, 8vo. edit. 1822, viii. pp. 107—114.

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

² Romans ii. 4.

³ Psalm xxv. 8.

⁴ Verses 12, 64.

into the shade, constituting of itself a complete mirror of infinite and everlasting goodness—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,"¹ What can I say to this—but "*Thou art good and doest good.*" What may I not then expect from thee! "*Teach me thy statutes.*"—Teach me the Revelation of thyself—Teach me the knowledge of thy Son. For "*This is life eternal, that I might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*"²

69. *The proud have forged a lie against me; but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.*

IF the Lord *does us good*, we must expect Satan to do us evil. Acting in his own character, as a "liar and a father of it,"³ he readily puts it into the hearts of his children to "*forge lies against*" the children of God! But all is over-ruled by the ever-watchful care and providence of God for the eventual good of his church. The cross frightens the insincere, and removes them out of the way; while the steadfastness of his own people marvellously displays to the world the power and triumph of faith. A most delightful source of encouragement in this fiery trial is to take off the eye from the objects of sense, and to fix it upon Jesus as our pattern, no less than our life. For as in every trial we enjoy the high honour and privilege of being conformed to his suffering image, so his life, and daily sorrows and tribulations, supply to us equal direction and support. Do "*the proud forge lies against us?*" So did they against him.⁴—"The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple, that he

¹ John iii. 16.

² John xvii. 3.

³ Ib. viii. 44.

⁴ Compare Matt. xxvi. 59—61.

be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household." ¹ The exhortation therefore of the apostle speaks to this case — "*Consider him, that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds?*" ²

But is it always "*lies that are forged against us?*" Is there no worldliness, or pride, or inconsistency in temper and walk, that opens the mouths of the enemies of the gospel, and causes "the way of truth to be evil spoken of?" ³ Do they not sometimes "say all manner of evil against some of us, for Christ's sake;" yet alas! not altogether "falsely?" ⁴ "Woe unto the world, because of offences!, for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man, by whom the offence cometh!" ⁵ If however the reproach of the world be "the reproach of Christ," "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised." ⁶ Insincerity of heart is one of the most powerful hindrances to a consistent and persevering endurance of the cross. A heart divided between God and the world will ever be found faulty and backsliding. ⁷ *Wholeness of heart* in the precepts of God adorns the Christian profession, awes the ungodly world, realizes the full extent of the Divine promises, and pours into the soul such a spring-tide of enjoyment, as more than counterbalances all the reproach, contempt, and falsehood, which the forge of the great enemy is employing against us with unceasing activity, and relentless hatred. Yet forget

¹ Matt. x. 24, 25.

² 2 Peter ii. 2.

⁵ Matt. xviii. 7.

⁷ Compare Hosea x. 2. Jer. iii. 10.

² Heb. xii. 3.

⁴ See Matt. v. 11.

⁶ Heb. x. 23.

not, believer, that these proofs of the malicious enmity of the proud must often be received as the gentle stroke of your Father's chastisement. Let the fruits of it then be daily visible in the work of mortification—in the exercise of the suffering graces of the gospel of Christ—in your growing conformity to his image—and in a progressive meetness for the world of eternal uninterrupted love.

70. *Their heart is as fat as grease: but I delight in thy law.*

AN awful description of the hardened state of *the proud forgers of lies!* Yet not of their state only, but of every sinner who stands out in wilful rebellion against God. The tremendous blow of Almighty justice has benumbed his heart, so that the pressure of mountains of sin and guilt is unfelt! The heart is left of God—"seared with a hot iron,"¹ and therefore without tenderness; "past feeling;"² unsoftened by the touch and power of the word; unhumbled by the rod of providential dispensations, given up to the heaviest of all spiritual judgments! But it is of little avail to stifle the voice of conscience, unless the same power or device could annihilate hell. It will only "awake out of sleep, like a giant refreshed with wine,"³ and rage with ten-fold interminable fury in the eternal world, from the temporary restraint, which for a short moment had benumbed its energy. Wilful resistance of the light of the gospel and the strivings of the Spirit is the awful provocation, that has constrained from a God of love the message of judicial abandonment—"Make the heart of this people fat,

¹ 1 Timothy iv. 2.

² Eph. iv. 18, 19.

³ Psalm lxxviii. 66. P. T.

and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”¹ Who then among us will not cry—*From hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word and Commandment, Good Lord! deliver us!*² Tenderness is the first mark of the touch of grace, when the heart becomes sensible of its own insensibility, and contrite on account of its own hardness. ‘Nothing’—said Jerome, in a letter to a friend—‘makes my heart sadder, than that nothing makes it sad.’ But when “the plague of our own heart” begins to be “known,”³ and to become matter of confession, humiliation, and prayer ; the promise of “a new heart,” is as life from the dead.⁴ Now then the subject of this promise *delights in God’s law* ; and this, amidst the sometimes overwhelming power of natural corruption, gives a satisfactory witness of a change “from death unto life.”

Christian ! can you daily witness the wretched condition of the ungodly, without the constraining recollection of humiliation and love ? What sovereign grace, that the Lord of glory should have set his love upon one so vile.⁵ What mighty power to have raised my insensible heart to that *delight in his law*, which conforms me to the image of his dear Son.⁶ Deeply would I “abhor myself ;” and gladly would I acknowledge, that the service of ten thousand hearts would be a poor return for such unmerited love.⁷ As for those who are left without the quickening influence of the Divine Spirit, all is death ! “Come from the

¹ Isaiah vi. 9, 10.

² 1 Kings viii. 38.

⁵ Eph. ii. 4, 5.

⁷ John vi. 63.

² Litany.

⁴ Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

⁶ See Psalm xl. 8.

four winds, O breath; and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”¹

Let us apply, for the purpose of daily self-examination, this description of the heart, either as given up to its natural insensibility, or as cast into the Scripture mould of “*delight in the law of God.*” Such an examination will prove to us, how much even renewed souls need of the transforming, softening, influences of grace. “The deceitfulness of sin” spreads a hardness over the heart,² which, if left to itself, would soon revert to its original character—“*as fat as grease*”—unfeeling—incapable of impression without a divine touch. O Lord, let not my heart be unvisited for one day, one hour, by that melting energy of love, which first made me feel, and constrained me to love.

71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

IF I mark in myself any difference from the ungodly—if I can feel that the natural insensibility of my heart is yielding to the influence of grace—if I am enabled to “*delight in God’s law,*” which before I had neglected as a “strange thing;”³ where and by what means has this change been produced? If this transformation—by which “God has made my heart soft,”⁴ which before was “*as fat as grease*”—has been wrought in the school of affliction; let me be ready to acknowledge—“*It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*” None indeed but the Lord’s scholars can know the benefit of this school, and this teaching. If any special lesson is to be taught, it will probably be learned there; for there it is, that “he

¹ Ezek. xxxvii. 9.

² Hosea viii. 12.

³ Heb. iii. 13.

⁴ Job xxiii. 16.

showeth us our work ; he openeth also our ear to discipline." ¹ ' I never,'—said Luther—' knew the meaning of God's word, until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters.' ² This teaching—as the fruit of affliction—marks the sanctified from the unsanctified cross. For it may be most truly said, that affliction under this divine teaching explains many a hard text, and seals many a precious promise.

Indeed we should miss much of the meaning and spiritual blessing of the word, if we were not more or less placed under this discipline. For how can we have any experimental acquaintance with the promises of God except we are brought into those circumstances for which the promises are made? How, for example, could we understand the full mercy of such a gracious word—"*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,*" ³—unless our condition were such, as to remind us of our Lord's declaration, "In the world ye shall have tribulation?" ⁴ And how much more profitable is this learning acquired in the school of experience, than the result of mere human instruction! When therefore we are

¹ Job xxxvi. 8—10.

² On another occasion, referring to some spiritual temptation on the morning of the preceding day, he added to a friend (Justin Jonas), ' Doctor, I must mark the day ; I was yesterday at school,' Milner, v. 484. In one of his works, he most accurately calls affliction ' the theology of Christians '—' theologium Christianorum.' To the same purport is the testimony of a learned French divine, and tried saint of God—' I have learned more divinity,' said Dr. Rivet, confessing to God of his last days of affliction—' in these ten days that thou art come to visit me, than I did in fifty years before. Thou hast brought me to myself. " Before I was afflicted I went astray," and was in the world ; but now I am conversant in the school of my God ; and he teacheth me after another manner than all those doctors, in reading whom I spent so much time.'—*Middleton's Biog.* Evan. iii. 238.

³ Psalm l. 15.

⁴ John xvi. 33.

led to pray for a clearer apprehension and interest in the contents of the blessed book, and for a deeper experience of its power upon our hearts; we are in fact often unconsciously supplicating for the chastening rod of our Father's love. For it is the man "whom the Lord chasteneth," that he "teacheth out of his law."¹ Peter indeed, when on the mount of transfiguration, said—"It is good for us to be here. Let us build here three tabernacles." Here let us abide in a state of comfort, indulgence, and sunshine. But well was it added by the sacred historian—"Not knowing what he said."² The judgment of David was far more correct, when he pronounced, that "*it was good for him that he had been afflicted.*" For so often are we convicted of inattention to the voice of the Lord—so often do we find ourselves looking back upon forsaken Sodom, or lingering in the plains, instead of pressing onward to Zoar³ that the indulgence of our own liberty would shortly hurry us along the pathway of destruction. Alas! often do we feel the spirit of prayer to be quenched for a season by "an heart overcharged with the cares of this life"⁴—or by the overprizing of some lawful comfort—or by a temper inconsistent with our Christian profession—or by an undue confidence in the flesh. And at such season of backsliding, we must count among our choicest mercies, the gracious discipline, by which the Lord schools us with the cross, "*that we may learn his statutes.*"

Are you, then, tried believer, disposed to regret the

¹ Psalm xciv. 12. The use of the word *παιδεία* in the acceptation of chastening (LXX. in this verse, and Heb. xii. 5.) is remarkable, as describing literally the instruction, by which a child is trained to the acquisition of useful knowledge, which, however, not being generally effected without chastening, accounts for the use of the word, to mark the discipline, which usually attends instruction.

² Luke ix. 33. ³ Comp. Gen. xix. 17—23. ⁴ Luke xxi. 34.

lessons you have already learned in this school; or can you conceive that you have purchased them at too dear a cost? Do you grieve over the bleedings of a contrite heart, that have brought you under the care of the healing physician? Or do you know any other way, by which you could have obtained so rich a knowledge of his love, or have been trained to such implicit obedience to his will? As Jesus, "though he were a Son, yet learned obedience by the things that he suffered;"¹ so may we "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of his sufferings,"² and be thankful to learn the same obedience, as the evidence and fruits of our conformity to him.

The Lord save us from the greatest of all afflictions, an affliction lost!³ "Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited."⁴ "He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."⁵ A call to tremble and repent, to watch and pray, and "turn to him that smiteth us!"⁶

Oh! is there one of that countless throng surrounding the everlasting throne, that is not ready with this song of praise: "*it is good for me that I have been afflicted?*" "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and *whence came they?* And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which *came out of great tribulation*, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."⁷

¹ Heb. v. 8.

² 1 Peter iv. 13.

³ Compare 1 Kings xiii. 33. 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

⁴ Jer. vi. 8.

⁵ Prov. xxix. 1.

⁶ Isaiah ix. 13.

⁷ Rev. vii. 13, 14.

72. *The law of thy mouth is better unto me, than thousands of gold and silver.*

WELL might David acknowledge the benefit of *affliction*, since he had thus "*learned in God's statutes*" something that was "*better to him than thousands of gold and silver.*" This was indeed an enlightened judgment for one to form, who had so small a part of "*the law of God's mouth,*" and so large a portion of this world's treasure. And yet, if we study only his book of Psalms to know the important uses and privileges of *this law*, and his son's book of Ecclesiastes to discover the *real* value of paltry *gold and silver*,¹ we shall under Divine teaching be led to make the same estimate for ourselves. With the same, or rather with far higher delight than the miser calculates his "*thousands of gold and silver,*" does the believer tell out the precious contents of *the law of his God*. After having endeavoured in vain to count the "*thousands*" in his treasure, he is constrained to sum up their value by a single name—"the unsearchable riches of Christ."² Would not the smallest spot of ground be estimated at the price of "*thousands of gold and silver,*" if it were known to conceal under its surface a mine of inexhaustible treasure? This it is that makes the word so inestimable. It is the field of the "*hidden treasure.*" "*The pearl of great price*"³ is known to be concealed here. The believer would not therefore part with one leaf of his Bible for all the "*thousands of gold and silver*" that the world could empty before him. He knows himself to be in possession of the substance—he has found

¹ Eccles. v. 9—20; vi. 1, 2.

² Eph. iii. 8.

³ Matthew xiii. 44—46.

all besides to be a shadow. "I lead"—saith the Saviour—"in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; *that I may cause them that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*"¹ The grand object therefore of "searching the Scriptures," is because "they testify of Christ."² A sinner has but one want—a Saviour. A believer has but one desire—to know and win Christ.³ With a "single eye," therefore—an eye intent upon one point—he studies this blessed book. "With unveiled face he beholds in this glass the glory of the Lord;"⁴ and no arithmetic can compute the price of that, which is now unspeakably *better to him than* the treasures of the earth.

Christian! be ever ready with your testimony, that no book has imparted the delight which you have found in the book of God. You have here opened the surface of much intellectual interest and solid instruction. But it is the joy that you have found in the revelation of the Saviour—in his commands—in his promises—in his ways—that leads you to exclaim—"More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold!"⁵ Yes indeed—Every promise—every declaration—centering in him, is a pearl; and the word of God is full of these precious pearls. If then they be the richest, who have the best and the largest treasure; those who have most of the word in their hearts—not those who have most of the world in their possession—are justly entitled to this pre-eminence. "Let then the word of Christ dwell in us *richly* in all wisdom."⁶ For those who are rich in this heavenly treasure are men of substance indeed.

Can I add my testimony to this estimate of the

¹ Prov. viii. 20, 21.

² John v. 39.

³ Phil. iii. 8—10.

⁴ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

⁵ Psalm xix. 10.

⁶ Col. iii. 16.

sacred treasure? Many will inconsiderately acknowledge its supreme value, while they yet hesitate to relinquish even a scanty morsel of this world's portion for an interest in it. Do I then habitually prefer "*this law of God's mouth*" to every worldly advantage; so that I am ready to forego every selfish consideration,¹ if it may only be the means of uniting my heart more closely to the Book of God? If I cannot set my seal to the testimony here given of its value, I fear it must be, because I have not yet opened the mine. But if I can assent to this declaration of the man of God, I have made a far more glorious discovery than Archimedes; and therefore may take up his expression of joyful surprise—'I have found it! I have found it;'—What?—That which the world could never have given me—that which the world can never deprive me of.

Lord! help me to prize *the law* as coming from "*thy mouth*." Let it be for ever written upon my heart. Let me be daily exploring my hidden treasures. Let me be enriching myself and all around me with a present, possession and interest in these heavenly blessings.

¹ A Jewish Rabbi, when induced by the prospect of a lucrative situation to fix his settlement in a place *where there was no synagogue* is said to have resisted the temptation by the recollection of this verse—Poli Synopsis—in loco. A reproof to Christians, who, in "choosing the bounds of their habitation," have not always been single-minded in laying before them their Master's rule. Matt. vi. 33.

PART X.

73. *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me : give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.*

IN the vast universe of wonders, man is the greatest wonder—the noblest work of God. A council of the Sacred Trinity appears to have been held respecting his creation. “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”¹ What an amazing thought is it, that the three Eternal subsistents in the glorious Godhead should have united in gracious design and operation towards the dust of the earth! But thus man was formed—thus was he raised out of his parent dust—from this low original, to be immediately set apart “for the Master’s use”—the living temple and habitation of Divine glory—a Being full of God. The first moment that he opened his eyes to behold the light and beauty of the new-made world, the Lord separated him to receive the continual supply of his own life. His body was fitted as a tabernacle for his soul, “curiously wrought” by the hand of God; and all its parts and “members written in his book, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” Most naturally therefore does the contemplation of this “perfection of beauty” in the works of God, raise the grateful and adoring mind upward. “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth

¹ Genesis i. 26.

right well.”¹ “*Thy hands have made me and fashioned me.*”

But where the soul is alive to the recollection of being the workmanship of God, there will be a sense of important relation to God, and a desire for a spiritual principle of life and *understanding* to act according to this relation. Could we suppose that man was framed to eat, to sleep, and to die—that, after taking a few turns upon the grand walk of life, he was to descend into the world of eternal silence, we might well ask the question of God—“Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?”² But the first awakening of man from his death-like sleep enlightens him in the right knowledge of the end of his creation. He pleads his relation to God as the ground of his prayer for Divine teaching. What is it which thy creature and workmanship begs of thee? That, as thou hast given me a natural being, thou wouldest give me the principle of spiritual existence, without which my natural existence can never glorify thee: All the privileges of my creation were lost by the fall. Thou hast indeed “curiously wrought” my frame; but sin has marred all. Make me thy spiritual “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.”³ “*Give me understanding*”—spiritual knowledge, “*that I may learn thy commandments*”—“Renew a right spirit within me.”⁴

It is however impossible to convince the natural man, that he needs to make such a prayer as this. No—he is puffed up in his own wisdom. He cannot receive the divine testimony, that levels him, while he “understandeth not,” with “the beasts that perish”⁵ and tells him, that he must “become a fool

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 14—16.

² Psalm lxxxix. 47.

³ Eph. ii. 10.

⁴ Psalm li. 10.

⁵ Psalm xlix. 20.

that he may be wise.”¹ But should he ever know this radical change—his new state of existence, he will offer up this prayer eagerly and frequently; and every step of his way heaven-ward he will feel increasing need of Divine “wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

The song of heaven reminds us of this end of our creation—“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things; *and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*”² And in harmony with this song we must ever acknowledge, that the “Lord hath made all things for himself”³—that he “created all things for his glory.”⁴ The recollection also, that he “created us by Jesus Christ,”⁵ will bring before us the grand work of redemption, and the work of the new creation consequent upon it. He who created us in his own image, when that image was lost, that he might not lose his property in us, put a fresh seal upon his natural right in us by creation, and “purchased us with his own blood.” Oh! let us not then be insensible to this constraining motive to “*learn his commandments.*”—“Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”⁶

*74. They that fear thee, will be glad when they see me :
because I have hoped in thy word.*

How cheering is the converse with a tried and established believer! How satisfactory and enliven-

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 18.

² Rev. iv. 11.

³ Prov. xvi. 4.

⁴ Isaiah xliii. 7.

⁵ Eph. iii. 9. Col. i. 16. John i. 1—3.

⁶ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

ing is the exhibition of the power of his faith in the promises of God! And what an excitement to communion with God, to think that the light which he thus receives will shine on those around him! What a comfort will it be unto him even in his own hour of temptation, that the hope, which he is then enabled to maintain in the word of God, shall prove the stay—not only of his own soul—but of the Lord's people around him! Many a desponding Christian, oppressed with such fears as this—"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul,"¹—when he hears of one and another exercised in the same trials, and who have "*hoped in God's word,*" and have not been disappointed, "*will be glad when he sees them.*" Thus David recorded his conflicts, that we may not despair of our own; and his triumphs, that "in the name of our God we might set up our banners."² "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord."³ Thus also, when under affliction, he was comforted with the thought of comforting others with the history of his own experience—"My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O praise the Lord with me, and let us magnify his name together. He hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name; the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."⁴

In this view, the believer, who has been "sifted in the sieve" of temptation, without the least "grain" of faith

¹ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

² Ps. xx. 5.

³ Ps. xxvii. 13, 14.

⁴ Psalm xxxiv. 2, 3; xl. 3; cxlii. 7. Comp. also lxix. 30—32.

or hope “falling upon the earth,”¹ stands forth as a monument of the Lord’s faithfulness, to “strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a feeble heart, Be strong, fear not.”² Those that are “fearful, and of little faith,” “*are glad when they see him.*” They “thank God” for him, and “take courage”³ for themselves. What a motive is this to keep us from despondency and murmuring; that instead of destroying, by the indulgence of unbelief, those who are already “cast down,” we may enjoy the privilege of upholding their confidence, and ministering to their comfort! And how should the weak and distressed be excited to seek for and to prize the society of those, who have been instructed by the discipline of the Lord’s school!

Believer! what have you to tell to your discouraged brethren of the faithfulness of your God? Cannot you put courage into their hearts, by declaring that you have never been “ashamed of your hope?” Cannot you tell them from your own experience, that Jesus “is for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation?”⁴ Cannot you show them, that, because he has borne the burden of their sins, he is able to “bear their griefs, and to carry their sorrows?”⁵ that you have tried him, and that you have found him so? Oh! be animated—be encouraged to know more of Christ yourself; let your hope in him be strengthened, that you may cause gladness in the hearts of those *that see you*; so that “whether you be afflicted, or whether you be comforted, it may be for their consolation and salvation.”⁶

But O my God; how much cause have I for shame, that I impart so little of the glorious light of thy

¹ Amos ix. 9.

² Isaiah xxxv. 3, 4.

³ Acts xxviii. 15.

⁴ Isaiah xxviii. 16.

⁵ Isaiah liii. 4.

⁶ 2 Cor. i. 6.

truth to those around me. Perhaps some poor trembling sinner “*has been glad when he saw me,*” hoping to hear something of the Saviour from my lips, and has found me straitened and cold and dumb. Oh! that I may be so “filled with the Spirit,” so experienced in thy heavenly ways, that I may invite “all that fear thee to come to me,” that I may “tell them what thou hast done for my soul;”¹ so that “when men are cast down, they may say, There is lifting up.”²

75. *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*

THIS is the Christian’s hope and confidence—so invigorating to his own soul—so cheering to the church. ‘I know, O Lord, that thy rules of proceeding with me are agreeable to thy perfect wisdom; and I am equally satisfied, that the afflictions that thou hast laid upon me from time to time, are only to fulfil thy gracious and faithful promise of making me eternally happy in thyself.’ Blessed fruit of affliction! when we can thus “see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy”³—that his “thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil.”⁴ “The patience and faith of the saints” teaches this difficult but most consoling lesson. In deciphering the mysterious lines in God’s providence, they can say, “*I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.*” Who would charge the operator with cruelty, in cutting out the proud flesh, that was bringing death upon the old man? Who would not acknowledge the wisdom of his piercing

¹ Psalm lxi. 16.

² Job xxii. 29.

³ James v. 11.

⁴ Jer. xxix. 11.

work? Thus, when the Lord's painful work of humiliation separates us from our sin, weans us from the world, and brings us nearer to himself, what remains for us but thankfully to acknowledge his righteousness and truth? And how does this view of the Lord's dealings put unbelief to rebuke! so that we must humbly acknowledge of any suspicion "that God had forgotten to be gracious"—"This is our infirmity."¹

This assurance, that the Lord acts in perfect wisdom and intimate knowledge of our respective cases, leads his people to yield to his appointments in dutiful silence. It was this that made Aaron, under his most afflictive domestic calamity, "hold his peace."² Job under a similar dispensation was enabled to say—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."³ Eli's language in the same trial was—"It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."⁴ David hushed his impatient spirit into silence—"I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." And when Shimei cursed him, he said—"Let him alone; let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him."⁵ The Shunamite bowed in the meek resignation of faith; and, when severely exercised in the judgments of God, acknowledged—"It is well."⁶ Hezekiah kissed the rod, while it was smiting him to the dust—"Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken."⁷ Thus uniform is the language of the Lord's people under chastisement—"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right."

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 7—10.

² Job i. 21. Compare ii. 10.

³ Psalm xxxix. 9. 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12.

⁴ Isaiah xxxix. 8.

⁵ Lev. x. 1—3.

⁶ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

⁷ 2 Kings iv. 26.

But David not only acknowledges God's right to deal with him as he sees fit, and his wisdom in dealing with him as he actually had done: he goes further than this—he says—“*Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*” He sees as much love as wisdom in the trials the Lord appointed for him, and acknowledges them as the faithful performance of the engagements of his everlasting covenant.¹ Thus the believer may always trace, (and it is his privilege to believe it, even when he cannot visibly observe it) the reasons of chastisement to the purposes of the Lord's faithful love to his soul.² Let him only mark its gracious effects in his restoration;³ in his instruction;⁴ in the healing of his backslidings,⁵ and the continual purging of his sins⁶—and then say—‘Is not the *faithfulness* of God gloriously displayed?’ The Philistines could not understand Samson's riddle—how ‘Meat could come out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong.’⁷ As little can the world comprehend the fruitfulness of the Christian's trials—how his gracious Lord sweetens to him the bitter waters of Marah,⁸ and makes the cross not so much the punishment, as the remedy of sin. He finds therefore no inclination, and he feels that he has no interest in having any change made in the Lord's appointments, painful as they may be to the flesh. He readily acknowledges that his merciful designs could not have been accomplished in any other way; while under trials many sweet tokens of love are vouchsafed, which under circumstances of outward

¹ Psalm lxxxix. 30—32.

² Deut. viii. 16.

³ Verse 67, and texts referred to on that verse.

⁴ Verse 71, and texts.

⁵ Hosea ii. 6, 7, 14.

⁶ Isaiah xxvii. 9; xlviii. 10. Zech. xiii. 9. John xv. 2.

⁷ Judges xiv. 14.

⁸ See Exod. xv. 23—25.

prosperity, could not have been received with the same gratitude and delight.

You that are living at ease in the indulgence of what this poor world can afford, how little does the Christian envy your portion! How surely in some future day will you be taught by experience to envy his! The world's riches are becoming poorer, and the world's pleasures more tasteless every day. And what will they be, and how will they appear, when eternity is at hand! Whereas affliction is the special token of our Father's love,¹ conformity to the image of Jesus, and preparation for his service and kingdom. It is the only blessing that the Lord gives, without requiring us to ask for it.² We must therefore receive it as promised, not as threatened; and when "the peaceable fruits of righteousness,"³ which it worketh in God's time and way, begin to spring up in our hearts, humbly and gratefully will we acknowledge the *righteousness* of his "*judgments*," and the "*faithfulness*" of his corrections.

76. *Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.*

WHAT! does the Psalmist then seek his comfort from the very hand that strikes him? This is the exercise of genuine faith. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."⁴

¹ Hebrews xii. 6. Rev. iii. 19.

² Phil. i. 29. Lord Bacon somewhere remarks, 'that, however temporal prosperity may have been promised to the church under the Old Testament; affliction and suffering, and trial, are the promises made to the church under the gospel dispensation.'

³ Such as patience, experience, hope—the work of tribulation. Heb. xii. 11, with Rom. v. 3—5.

⁴ Job xiii. 15.

Several of the preceding verses have spoken of affliction.¹ The Psalmist now presents his petition for alleviation under it. But of what kind? He does not ask to have it removed. He does not "beseech the Lord, that it might depart from him."² No. His repeated acknowledgments of the supports vouchsafed under it, and the benefits he had derived from it, had reconciled him to commit its measure³ and continuance to the Lord. All that he needs, and all that he asks for, is a sense of his "*merciful kindness*" upon his soul. Thus he submits to his justice in his accumulated trials, and expects consolation under them solely upon the ground of his free favour. Indeed, as far as we are Christians, nothing beside can afford a moment's rest to the soul. The whole earth in its brightest visions of delight, destitute of the light of God's countenance, is a barren wilderness, a state of exile. It matters little where we are, or what we have. In the fulness of refreshing ordinances, unless the Lord meets us, and blesses us with his "*merciful kindness for our comfort*," we are as "in a thirsty land where no water is." Absalom might as well have been at Geshur as at Jerusalem, as long as he "saw not the king's face."⁴ Nothing, that the Lord "gives his people richly to enjoy," will satisfy, if this source of refreshment be withheld. The worldling's inquiry is,—“who will show us any good?” The Christian forms his answer into a prayer,—“Lord! lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me.”⁵ "*Let thy merciful kindness be for my comfort.*" This gives the enjoyment of every real good, and supplies the place of every fancied good. It is a blessing that never cloy, and will never end; and so sweet is the relish,

¹ Verses 67, 71, 75.² 2 Cor. xii. 8.³ Jer. x. 24.⁴ Compare 2 Sam. xiv. 23, 24.⁵ Psalm iv. 6.

that every fresh taste quenches the thirst for earthly pleasures. "Whosoever drinketh of this water"—said our Divine Saviour—"shall thirst again. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."¹ "Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."²

But—Reader—do you wish to realize this comfort? Then must you seek to approach your God by the only way of access. You must learn to contemplate him in the only glass in which he is exhibited as a God of love—"in the face of Jesus Christ."³ You must guard against looking for comfort from any other source. You must beware especially of that satisfaction in creature cisterns, which draws you away from "the fountain of living waters."⁴ You must learn also to prize this comfort supremely, and not to be content without some enjoyment, or even with a scanty measure of enjoyment; but rather let every refreshment of the day be made a step for desiring and attaining renewed and sweeter refreshment for to-morrow. There is however a propensity in some to look at David's experience, as if *at present* they could hardly expect to reach its happiness; and so they go on in a low, depressed, and almost sullen state, refusing the privileges, which are as freely offered to them as to others. But such a state of mind is highly dishonourable to God. Let them seek to rouse their hearts from it, by an earnest pleading of their interest in the word of promise—"according to thy word unto thy servant." Let them lay their fingers upon one or all of the promises of their God. Let them spread before the Lord his own hand-writing and seals; and their Saviour hath said—"According to your faith be

¹ John iv. 13, 14.

² Psalm xxxvii. 4.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 6. Compare John xiv. 6.

⁴ Jer. ii. 13.

it unto you.”¹ “The king is held in the galleries;”² and, if he should make as though he would go farther, he is willing that we should “constrain him, saying—Abide with us.”³ No veil now but the veil of unbelief need hinder us from seeing an unclouded everlasting smile of “*merciful kindness*” upon our heavenly Father’s reconciled face. Only let us see to it, that he is the first, the best, the habitual object of our contemplation, the satisfying well-spring of our delight—that he is the one only desire, to which every other is subordinate, and in which every other is absorbed.

Lord Jesus! I would seek for a renewed interest

¹ Matt. ix. 29. The writer cannot forbear indulging himself with a transcript of the prayers of Monica, Augustine’s mother, as a beautiful example of this earnestness and simplicity of faith in pleading the promises of the word—‘Lord, these promises were made to be made good to some, and why not to me? I hunger; I need; I thirst; I wait. Here is thy hand-writing in thy word; and in the last sacrament I had thy seal affixed to it. I am resolved to be as importunate till I have obtained, and as thankful afterwards, as by thy grace I shall be enabled; being convinced that I am utterly lost and undone, if thou hearest not the desires of the humble; and if thou dost hear and grant, I am so well acquainted with myself and with my own heart, that I have nothing to glory in; but I shall wholly glory in the Lord; and I do resolve and believe, that I shall to all eternity celebrate and magnify the riches of thy grace. Thy promises are the discoveries of thy purposes, and vouchsafed as materials for our prayers; and in my supplications I am resolved every day to present and tender them back to thee; and if thou wilt have regard to them, and appear to be a “God of truth” to my soul; a poor creature that hath long feared to burn in hell for hypocrisy, will be secured and made happy for ever. I am resolved to wait upon thee, and to cast down my soul upon thee in this way; and thou hast assured me, thou art a “God of judgment.” Thou didst promise in judgment. Thou knewest what thou didst in making such promises; and thou wilt be a “God of judgment;” thou knowest when and where to make them good; and thou hast pronounced—“Blessed are all they that wait for thee.” On thee I will wait, and for this blessing I will hope and look.

² Can. vii. 5; also vi. 5.

³ Compare Luke xxiv. 28, 29, with Gen. xxxii. 26—29. Compare the invitation given, Can. iv. 16, instantly accepted, v. 1.

in “*thy merciful kindness.*” I would not forget, that it was this that brought thee down from heaven—that led thee to endure the death of the cross—that has washed me in thy precious blood—that visits me with many endearing tokens of thy presence. O let all my days be spent in the sense of this “*merciful kindness for my comfort,*” and in rendering to thee the unworthy returns of grateful obedience and filial service.

77. *Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live ;
for thy law is my delight.*

AGAIN he prays for mercy. Such is his intense and restless desire. Before it was the mercy of forgiveness. Now it is quickening—comforting—*tender mercy.* Yes—the Lord’s mercies are “*tender mercies.*” “*Like as a father, he pitieth his children.*”¹ He yearns over them—“*How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.*”² When his prodigal child returned, probably expecting nothing but upbraiding looks, if not a wrathful frown of banishment; the “*tender mercies*” of his Father buried not only his sins, but also his very confessions, in the depths of the sea; and he was welcomed to his forsaken home with the most affectionate tokens of unabated love.³ As a Father, he puts away from his children all anxiety respecting “*what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed,*” with

¹ Psalm ciii. 13.

² Hosea xi. 8. Jer. xxxi. 20.

³ Compare Luke xv. 20—24.

the parental assurance, that he “knoweth that they have need of these things.”¹ As a Father, he also “chasteneth”² them—“he suffereth their manners”³—he “spareth them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”⁴—and finally, he determineth respecting each of them by an act of sovereign will and power—“Thou shalt call me, My Father, and shalt not depart from me.”⁵ Again, let us look at him in a yet more endearing character—“As one whom *his mother comforteth*, so will I comfort you. They may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”⁶ Now are not these “*tender mercies*?” And when they “*come unto*” the soul, do they not become the principle of spiritual life, devotedness, and enjoyment? David’s soul had been quickened from that awful “death in trespasses and sins;”⁷ but he was not content, nor will any upright believer be content, with the mere breathing of spiritual existence. He seeks to “*live*,” not as the trees of winter that are alive, and but just alive—but vigorous, thriving, fruitful, living to God and for God in every form and sphere, in every hour and action of the day, his feebleness becoming strength in the Lord, so that he “walks up and down in his name.”⁸ Thus does he “reign in life;”⁹ rising to more of its honour and dignity, and reaching forth to more of its excellence and happiness.

But let us not lose sight of the Author of our life—the abundant overflowing spring from which it is maintained. In Christ was life;¹⁰ and he “came that we might have life, and that we might have

¹ Matthew vi. 25—34.

³ Acts xiii. 18.

⁶ Jer. iii. 19.

⁷ Eph. ii. 1.

⁹ Rom. v. 17.

² Deut. viii. 5.

⁴ Mal. iii. 17.

⁶ Isaiah xlvi. 13; xlix. 15.

⁸ Zech. x. 12.

¹⁰ John i. 4.

it more abundantly.”¹ There can be therefore no exercises of life without a vital union to Christ—the source of life. Shall we then give up the hope of believing in Christ, till we feel the power and influence of this spiritual principle? This would be indeed like refusing to abide in the vine, till we could bring forth fruit; whereas the branch, while separated from the vine, must ever be fruitless and withered.² *We must receive life from Christ, not bring it to him.* Faith implants us in him, and “Christ dwelling in the heart by faith” becomes the life of the soul, animating and moving it in the ways of God.³

This life therefore will manifest itself in *delight in God's law*.—We shall not be satisfied to live upon the mere surface of the gospel (which is barren and unproductive, as any other surface, in spiritual usefulness,) but we shall search into its hidden treasures, and draw forth its real life and consolation. This “*delight*” will furnish a plea for our use at the throne of grace.—‘If this is a fruit and acting of the life of thine own implanting, Lord! cherish it. Let me live by the influence of “*thy tender mercies*.” I venture to plead my delight in thy law as an evidence of my adoption into thy family. And therefore I would renew my plea and my petition—“*Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that*” my life may be not only existence, but enjoyment—the beginning, the earnest, of the everlasting life and bliss of heaven.’

¹ John x. 10.

² John xv. 4—6.

³ Compare Gal. ii. 20, with Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

78. *Let the proud be ashamed ; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause : but I will meditate in thy precepts.*

THE prophecy with which God himself condescended to open the history of the Church, has ever since been in the course of accomplishment.¹ “Enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman,” has been the prevailing character and course of the world. “An unjust man is an abomination to the just ; and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.”² David however prayed for the confusion of his enemies—not in a vindictive spirit, as if thirsting for their destruction ; but rather as a wholesome chastening, that might eventually turn to their salvation—“Fill their faces with shame, *that they may seek thy name, O Lord.*”³ That his prayer was the expression of his tender compassion, rather than of resentful feeling, is sufficiently evident from his affectionate weeping concern for their immortal interests.⁴ Prayers of the same deprecating character dropped from the lips of the gentle and compassionate Saviour ;⁵ while the objects of his awful deprecations were interested in the most yearning sympathies of his heart.⁶ A regard however for the honour of God combined with a view to the eventual interest of his enemies to dictate this prayer in David’s heart. He knew that their malice against him was only the working of their enmity against God ; that it was for his sake that they hated him ; that it was not so much him that they hated

¹ Gen. iii. 15. Compare Rev. xii. 17.

³ Psalm lxxxiii. 16.

⁵ Psalm lxix. 21—28.

² Prov. xxix. 27.

⁴ Verses 53, 136, 158.

⁶ Comp. Matt. xxiii. 37.

and persecuted, as God in him. And therefore as a servant of God he was ready to say—"Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved at those that rise up against thee? *I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies.*"¹ The followers of a despised Saviour must indeed expect to be sorely distressed with the *perverseness of the proud*. But when, like their Master, they can testify that it is "*without a cause,*"² they may take the encouragement of their Master's words—"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."³

And have you, Reader, been exercised with trials from an ungodly world? If you have been made the derision of the proud, or have been slighted, or ill-treated by the ungodly, has it never excited revengeful feelings within? Have you always been enabled to set your Saviour's example before you, and, "in patience possessing your soul," to refer your cause to your Almighty Father and Friend?—"O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."⁴ Remember he has engaged to take up your cause—"Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them! *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.*"⁵

The child of God in the hour of trial knows where to go, and what to do. Undismayed by difficulty, and accustomed to go to the word of God for direction and support, he "*meditates in his precepts.*" There

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22.

² Ib. xxxv. 19; lxix. 4; with John xv. 25.

³ Matthew v. 11, 12.

⁴ Isaiah xxxviii. 14. Compare Psalm cxl. 12, 13.

⁵ Luke xviii. 7, 8.

is often a hurry of mind in times of difficulty, which unhinges the soul from the simple exercise of faith. But habit brings practice, and steadiness, and simplicity, enabling us most sweetly to fix our hearts in recollection upon the word of God, and to apply its directions and encouragements to the exigency of the present moment. Our enemies fight against us with an arm of flesh. We resist them with the armour of the word of God. And how inestimably precious is the armour, refuge, strength, and consolation, here provided for us, against every effort to disturb our peace, "or separate our hearts from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

79. *Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.*

As the believer finds trouble from the world, he prays that he may find help from the Lord's people. And indeed the wise distribution of graces in the Church was ordained for the mutual help and sympathy of her several members. It is painful therefore to see Christians often walking aloof from each other, and suffering coldness, distance, and mutual differences and distrust to divide them from their brethren. Under such circumstances the prayer may be most suitable, that he who has the hearts of all his people in his hand, would "*turn the hearts of those that fear him, and know his testimonies*" unto their brethren. It was the distinguishing mark set upon Mordecai, that he was "accepted of the multitude of his brethren."¹ In the primitive church it was recorded of Demetrius, that he had good report of all men, and of the truth itself,² and of the members of the

¹ Esther x. 3.

² 3 John 12.

church generally, that “they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart; praising God, and *having favour with all the people,*”¹ ‘Then,’—as Chrysostom exultingly exclaims,—‘the Church was a little heaven.’ Then they could say one to another,—“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;”² and even their Heathen neighbours were awed and constrained to the confession—“See how these Christians love one another.”

Alas! that our Jerusalem should no longer exhibit the picture of a “city compact together”³—that so many “walls of partition” should separate brother from brother—so many hindrances should interpose—so that our Zion has very rarely been exhibited in her “perfection of beauty,” when “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.”⁴ Prejudice and misconception divided Job from his friends.⁵ Want of forbearance cankered the union of the members of the church of Rome,⁶ and even prevailed to separate chief friends—Paul and Barnabas.⁷ Diversity of sentiment injured the influence of brotherly love at Corinth.⁸ And thus it has been in every successive age of the Church; so that the period is yet prospective, when the full answer to the Redeemer’s prayer, and the grand display to the world of the Divine original of the gospel, shall be manifested.⁹ But as “the com-

¹ Acts ii. 46, 47.

² Psalm cxxxiii. 1. Most truly catholic was the rule of the excellent Philip Henry, and most consistently exemplified in his Christian conduct, determining ‘in those things, in which all the people of God are agreed, to spend my zeal; and as for other things about which they differ, to walk according to the light God hath given me, and charitably to believe others to do so too.’—*Life, Williams’s Edition, p. 127.*

³ Psalm cxxii. 3.

⁴ Psalm i. 2, with Acts iv. 32.

⁵ Job vi. 29.

⁶ Rom. xiv. xv. 1—7.

⁷ Acts xv. 37.

⁸ 1 Cor. i. 10—12.

⁹ John xvii. 21.

munion of saints” was the peculiar feature of primitive Christianity, and has continued from the earliest times of the church to form an article of her faith; in proportion as we return to the primitive standard, we shall hold closer fellowship with each other—as “members of one body”¹—“considering one another, to provoke unto love and to good works”²—“bearing one another’s burdens;”³—and receiving one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”⁴

Want of Christian self-denial presents the main hindrance to this “keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” But—admitting that some of the brethren are “weak in the faith” in comparison with ourselves—are we then to be ‘rolling endlessly the returning stone’⁵ obtruding always the same stumbling offence upon them?⁶ We are “not to please ourselves” in compelling them to adopt our views; but rather to “receive them, and bear their infirmities.”⁷ Accursed be that charity that is preserved by “the shipwreck of faith!” But though scriptural truth must never be denied, there are times when it may be forborne. The Apostle “knew and was persuaded of the Lord Jesus, that there was nothing unclean of itself;”⁸ yet he would rather allow even the misconception of conscience until clearer light should be given, than endanger the unity of the church. Liberty must give place to love: and for himself, he would rather restrain himself from lawful indulgence, than hazard the safety of a weaker brother, or turn from one that loved his Saviour.⁹ Wherever, therefore, in the judgment of

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 12—27.² Heb. x. 24.³ Gal. vi. 2; v. 13.⁴ Rom. xv. 7.⁵ Morning Exercises, Oct. 1682.⁶ Rom. xiv. 1.⁷ Rom. xv. 1.⁸ Rom. xiv. 14.⁹ Ib. xiv. 13, 15. 1 Cor. viii. 13.

Christian charity we discover those "that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,"¹ we must be ready to give them our very hearts, to view them as brethren, as one with ourselves, and to welcome them with our expressions of brotherly love, as those whom, with all their infirmities, Jesus "is not ashamed to call his brethren."² We must be ready to "*turn to them,*" as those "*that fear God, and have known his testimonies.*"

And may not the believer's anxiety for the company and assistance of the Lord's people, serve as a rebuke to Christian professors, who are far too closely linked to the society of the world? Surely, if the lovely attraction of many of its most avowed votaries can compensate for the absence of their Saviour's image, they can have but little relish for that heavenly enjoyment, which unites the children of God together in close and hallowed communion with God. And do we not see a proof of the deteriorating influence of this worldly spirit, in their readiness to take disgust at the infirmities of the real brethren of the Lord, and to neglect the image of Christ in them, from the unsightliness of the garb, in which it may sometimes be covered?

But let us mark the completeness of the Christian—combining the fear with the knowledge of God. Knowledge without fear would be presumption. Fear without knowledge would be bondage. But the fear of God connected with an acquaintance with his ways, moulds the character of men of God into the spirit of love; and qualifies them, "as fathers"³ in the gospel, to counsel the weak and inexperienced. Should we, however, be excluded from the privilege of their

* ¹ Eph. vi. 14. Compare 1 John iii. 14.

² Heb. ii. 11, 12.

³ 1 John ii. 13, 14.

intercourse ; or should they be prevented from “ *turning unto us ;* ” it may be the appointed means of leading us to a more simple dependence on Divine teaching and grace, and to a more blessed anticipation of our Father’s house in heaven, where all will be harmony, peace and love. ‘ We shall carry truth and the knowledge of God to heaven with us ; we shall carry purity thither, devotedness of soul to God and our Redeemer, divine love and joy, if we have their beginnings here, with whatsoever else of permanent excellence, that hath a settled fixed seat and place in our souls now ; and shall there have them in perfection. But do you think we shall carry strife to heaven ? Shall we carry anger to heaven ? Envyings, heart-burnings, animosities, shall we carry these to heaven with ~~us~~ ? Let us labour to divest ourselves and strike off from our spirits every thing that shall not go with us to heaven, or is equally unsuitable to our end and way, that there may be nothing to obstruct and hinder our abundant entrance at length into the everlasting kingdom.’ ¹

80. *Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.*

How many “ have made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,” ² from a heart unsound “ *in the Lord’s statutes !* ” Not having seen the spiritual requirements of the statutes, and resting in an outward obedience, they falsely conceive themselves

¹ Howe’s Works^o, vol. iv. 126, 127—‘ It will be one of the felicities of heaven ’ (as Milner sweetly remarks upon the prejudices subsisting between Bernard and the supposed heretics of his day), ‘ that saints shall no longer misunderstand each other.’—*Milner’s History of the Church*, iii. 384.

² 1 Tim. i. 49.

to be "alive without the law,"¹ and, "touching the righteousness that is of the law, blameless."² Others go a little beyond the surface, while the want of "simplicity and godly sincerity," of brokenness of heart, love to the Saviour, and dependence upon his grace, sooner or later discovers to their eternal confusion, that "the root of the matter is" not "in them." "Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust." "Their goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."³ An unsound professor, like beautiful fruit, may attract the eye of a cursory beholder: but a more narrow inspection will show a worm at the core, which has spoiled nearly to the surface.⁴ We can give no better description of this religion, than as a shrivelled mass of inactive formality—a dead image of a living thing.

Alas! how common is it to profess to take Christ for a Saviour, while the heart is evidently worshipping Mammon as its God! How possible is it to be "carnally-minded" in the midst of daily engagements in spiritual exercises! How important is the recollection, that no change of place, of company, or of circumstances, can of itself effect a change of heart! "Saul among the prophets" was Saul still; with "another heart"⁵ indeed, but not a new heart. Sin was restrained, but not crucified. He "went out," therefore, as one of his progenitors, "from the presence of the Lord,"⁶ and perished a miserable apostate from *the statutes of his God*. Need we speak of Judas—a follower—a preacher—an apostle of Jesus

¹ Rom. vii. 9. ² Phil. iii. 6. ³ Isaiah v. 24. Hosea vi. 4.

⁴ 'Quæ splendent in conspectu hominis, sordent in conspectu judicis.' Compare Luke xvi. 15. 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

⁵ 1 Sam. x. 9—12.

⁶ Gen. iv. 16.

Christ—living in a familiar intercourse with his Lord—yet with all his privileges—all his profession—“gone to his own place”¹—the melancholy victim of his own self-deceitfulness? Need we allude to Balaam—“the man whose eyes were open—which heard the words of God—which saw the vision of the Almighty”—who could in the ken of his eye mark the goodliness of the inheritance of the Lord, and even in the distant horizon catch a glimpse of “Jacob’s star and sceptre,” and yet “loved the wages of unrighteousness?”² Need we bring to the mind’s eye Ananias and Sapphira³—Alexander⁴ and Demas⁵—and others of the same stamp of unsoundness—all of whom once shone as stars⁶ in the firmament of the church—need we speak of the end of these men, to give energy to the prayer—“*Let my heart be sound in thy statutes?*”

How fearful the thought of being “a branch in the true vine” only by profession! to be “taken away” at length—“cast forth as a branch—withered—gathered—cast into the fire—burned!”⁷ It is in the inner man that hypocrisy sets up its throne; whence it commands the outward acts into whatever shape or form may be best suited to effect its purpose. The upright Christian will therefore begin with calling in the help and light of God to ascertain the “*soundness of his heart.*” “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me.”⁸ Can that “*heart*” which is found upon inquiry to be earthly—unprofitable under the power of the word⁹—regarding “secret iniquity”¹⁰

¹ Acts i. 25. •

² Num. xxiv. 2—5, 17. ² Peter ii. 15.

³ Acts v. 1—10.

⁴ Acts xix. 33, 34, with 1 Tim. i. 20. ² Tim. iv. 14.

⁵ Col. iv. 14. Philem. 24, with 2 Tim. iv. 10. ⁶ Rev. xii. 4.

⁷ John xv. 2, 6.

⁸ Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

⁹ Hebrews vi. 8.

¹⁰ Psalm lxvi. 18.

—seeking bye-ends of praise,¹ reputation,² or gain³—and for the attainment of these ends shrinking from the appointed cross—can that “*heart be sound in the Lord’s statutes?*” Impossible!

But on the other hand, do you find that your trust in God is sincere, your desire towards him supreme, your obedience to him entire? Prize these evidences of “*soundness of heart.*” Thank God for them: for they are the workings of his mighty Spirit in your heart—perhaps the answers to the prayers, which that same Spirit had indited—“*Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.*” Diligently improve all the means of grace for keeping your heart in a sound and healthy state. Be daily—yea continually—abiding in the vine, and receiving life and health from its fulness.⁴ Be much conversant with the word of God—loving it for itself—for its holiness—for its practical influences. Be chiefly afraid of inward decays—of a barren, sapless notion of experimental truth; remembering, that, except your profession be constantly watered at the root, “the things that remain in you will be ready to die.”⁵ Specially “commune with your own heart;” and watch it jealously, because of its proneness to live upon itself—its own graces or fancied goodness (a sure symptom of unsoundness)—instead of “living by the faith of the Son of God.” Examine your settled judgment, your deliberate choice, your outgoing affections, your habitual allowed practice—applying to every detection of unsoundness the blood of Christ, as the sovereign remedy for the diseases of a “deceitful and desperately wicked heart.”

But it may be said—will not these exercises of godly

¹ 2 Kings ix. 16.

² John xii. 43.

³ John vi. 26. 1 Tim. vi. 5.

⁴ John xv. 4, 5.

⁵ Rev. iii. 2.

jealousy hinder our Christian assurance? Far from it. They will form an efficient preservative from carnal security. They will induce increasing tenderness, activity, and circumspection, in our daily walk; and thus, instead of retarding the enjoyment of our heavenly privilege, they will settle the foundation of a peaceful temperament within. Every unsound professor is under the blast of God; and even if he preserves an empty name in the church, will be *put to shame* before the universe of God.¹ But the "*sound heart*" is connected with "a hope that maketh not ashamed"—the full blessing of scriptural confidence. For the heart is made "*sound*" by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ;" and when thus "sprinkled from an evil conscience," we "have boldness" to "draw near"—yea—even to "enter into the holiest," "in full assurance in faith."² Blessed privilege of access and communion with our reconciled God! Every moment endears the Saviour to our souls, and enlivens the hope of his glorious coming, as the joyful consummation of all the prospects of faith—"Herein is our love made perfect, *that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.*"³

¹ Compare Dan. xii. 2. Luke xii. 1, 2.

² See Heb. x. 19—22.

³ 1 John iv. 17.

PART XI.

81. *My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy word.*

THE salvation of the Gospel was the constant object of faith and desire to the Lord's people, under the dispensation of the Old Testament. Long had the Church triumphed in the glowing anticipation, as if in the full possession of the promised blessing—"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for *he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*"¹ And as it was the joy of their living moments, so was it the support and consolation of their dying moments. "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord"²—was the expression of the dying Patriarch's faith. And how do the last words of this "sweet Psalmist of Israel," whose "*soul was now fainting for God's salvation,*" mark his cheerful confidence, even in the dark and foreboding prospect of his family! "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is *all my salvation,* and all my desire, although

¹ Isaiah xxv. 9; lxi. 10.

² Gen. xlix. 18.

he make it not to grow.”¹ Good old Simeon in the break of the gospel-day was ready to “depart in peace, for his eyes had seen God’s salvation.”² And if our souls are under the heavenly influence of this salvation, we shall naturally appropriate these feelings of ancient believers to ourselves; nor will any interpreter but experience be needed to explain them. The uneasiness that is felt in any interruption of our enjoyment, will show the soul to be “*fainting for this salvation.*” Nothing will satisfy but the Saviour. The tempting offer of “all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,” will fail in attraction. Still the cry will be—“Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”³ “*Let thy salvation come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word.*”⁴

If I am the lowest expectant of this salvation, I ought to feel myself richer than the sole possessor of this world’s portion. And therefore if the Lord hides his face, I would look to no other quarter; I would stay by him, and “wait on him,” though days and months and years may pass away, “until he have mercy upon me.”⁵ “*My soul fainteth for his salvation;*” and with the fullest cup of earth’s best joy pressed to my lips, my heart would burst with despair of satisfaction, “but” that “*I hope in this word.*” “By this hope I am saved.”⁶ In “the patience of hope,”⁷ I am resolved to wait until the last moment, lying at the footstool of my Saviour. I am looking for the “assurance of this hope”⁸—when I shall be able to anticipate the prospect of eternity, and with “the earnest of” the heavenly “inheritance” in my soul, to

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

² Luke ii. 28—30.

³ Psalm xxxv. 3.

⁴ Verse 41.

⁵ Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2.

⁶ Rom. viii. 24.

⁷ 1 Thess. i. 3.

⁸ Heb. vi. 11.

echo the voice of my coming Saviour—"Even so come, Lord Jesus."¹

Oh, how precious and important a part of our armour is Hope! As an "helmet,"² it has "covered our head in the day of battle," from many a "fiery dart of the wicked." In times of darkness—when the restless foe hides the prospect from the eye of faith, and the child of God can scarcely, if at all, mount up and sing—even then hope remains, and lights a taper in moments dark as the chamber of the grave—"Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time; and in the night season his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."³ And when the afflicted tempest-tossed soul is trembling at the prospect of impending danger—at this moment of infinite peril, Hope holds out the "anchor sure and stedfast;"⁴ so that in the awful crisis, when "deep calleth unto deep, and all the waves and billows are going over us,"⁵ most unexpectedly "an entrance is ministered unto us *abundantly*" in the Lord's best time into our desired haven.⁶ And it is this hope alone that sustains us. Were we to conceive of God according to the notions of our own hearts, we should give way to most unbelieving impatience. But in the believing apprehension of the Divine character—as it shines forth in the word with such love and wisdom, such tenderness and grace—our hope is increased and encouraged. The strength of the strongest of God's people proves but small, when afflictions press heavy and expected help is delayed. But though the "*soul fainteth*," it cannot fail. Fixed upon the promises of God, it gathers strength and hope. The word

¹ Rev. xxii. 20.

³ Psalm xlii. 8.

⁵ Psalm xlii. 7.

² Eph. vi. 17. 1 Thess. v. 8.

⁴ Heb. vi. 19.

⁶ 2 Peter i. 11. Psalm cvii. 30.

of God is faith's sure venture for eternity—stamped with such a marvellous mysterious impression of Divine glory and faithfulness, and communicating such Divine power and refreshment, that the believer cannot but produce his experience of its efficacy for the support of his tempted brethren. “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”¹

82. *Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?*

THOUGH the believer may be enabled, in the habitual working of faith, to sustain his “*hope in the word*” of his God, yet “*hope deferred maketh the heart sick.*”² Perhaps you feel, Christian, that you have waited long; and still the promise is delayed. But what is the blessing that you are waiting for? If it regards *the actual life* of your soul, this, as being absolutely necessary, is both promised and given. If it regards *your spiritual enjoyment*, its time and measure must be left with the Lord. Meanwhile do not fear that by the lengthened delay the blessing is likely to escape from you. You will find in the end, that perseverance in waiting has turned to double advantage; and that many prayers have been answered, and important blessings vouchsafed, even when sensible refreshment and acceptance were withheld. Indeed, how blessed is the fruit of severe and protracted trial—to mark the merciful purpose of God in bringing the wayward will into more entire subjection to himself!

¹ Psalm xxvii. 13, 14.

² Prov. xiii. 12.

Yea—the blessing will be so much the sweeter, from being vouchsafed in the Lord's best time. Waiting time—whatever weariness may attend it—is precious time, and not a moment of it will be lost. The Lord secretly upholds faith and patience, so that every step of feeble perseverance in the way, brings with it unspeakable delight. Even while *our eyes fail* for the fulfilment of *the word*, peace is found in submission and joyful expectation; and instead of a time of hardness, indolence, or carelessness, the Lord's return is anticipated the more intensely, as his absence had been felt to be the most painful trial. For as well might the stars supply the place of the sun, as outward comforts, or even the external duties of religion, supply to the waiting soul the place of an absent God.

Never, however, let us forget, that the real cause of separation between God and a sinner is removed. The way of access is opened by the blood of Jesus;¹ and in this way we must be found waiting, until he look upon us. Here will our cry—“*When wilt thou comfort me?*” be abundantly answered; and though the sovereignty of God will be exhibited, in the time and measure of his consolations, yet the general rule will be—according to your faith be it unto you.²

But if unbelief has clouded the Christian's comfort—let his eye be directed with more simple faith to the “*word*” as testifying of Jesus. Here alone is the ground of comfort; and the more confidently he expects, the more patiently he will look. Nor will he look in vain. Sin will be rebuked.³ But restoration and acceptance are assured to him. He will obtain—not the spurious comfort of delusion, but those wholesome comforts, founded upon the word of promise, and

¹ Hebrews x. 19, 20.

² Matthew ix. 29.

³ Psalm lxxxix. 30—32.

connected with contrition, peace, love, joy, and triumph. The gospel shows hell deserved, and heaven purchased—thus combining conviction and faith. Indeed, conviction without faith would be legal sorrow: as assurance without conviction would be gospel presumption. Paul's experience happily united both. Never was man at the same moment more exercised with conflict, and yet more established in assurance.¹ Thus may we maintain our assurance *as really* in wrestling trouble as in exulting joy; honouring the Lord by, an humble, patient spirit—in Bernard's resolution—'I will never come away from thee without thee'—in the true spirit of the wrestling patriarch—"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."² †

But we sometimes seem to go—as Job says—"mourning without the sun"³—"shut up, and we cannot come forth"⁴—straitened in our desires, our hopes and expectations—doing little for the Lord—with little enjoyment in our own souls, and little apparent usefulness to the church. At such seasons it is our clear path of duty and privilege to "wait for the Lord,"—to "wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and to *look for him*."⁵ He "waiteth that he may be gracious. He is a God of judgment: and blessed are all they that wait for him."⁶

¹ Compare Romans vii. 14—25; viii. 33—39.

² Genesis xxxii. 26.

³ Job xxx. 28.

⁴ Psalm lxxxviii. 8.

⁵ Isaiah viii. 17.

⁶ Isaiah xxx. 18. 'Thou mayest seek after honours, and not obtain them; thou mayest labour for riches, and yet remain poor; thou mayest dote on pleasures, and have many sorrows. But our God of his supreme goodness says—Who ever sought me, and found me not? Who ever desired me, and obtained me not? Who ever loved me, and missed of me? I am with him, that seeks for me. He hath me already, that wisheth for me; and he that loveth me is sure of my love. The way to come to me is neither long nor difficult.'—

83. *For I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget thy statutes.*

THE shrivelled *bottles* of skin (such as the deceitful Gibeonites brought to Joshua¹), hung up *in the smoke*, afforded to David a lively picture of the state to which his long-protracted afflictions had reduced him. Thus he elsewhere describes the same state of affliction under somewhat similar figures—"I am like a broken vessel. My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth."² Thus also Job speaks of himself—"My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat."³ The church gives nearly the same representation of her deep distress—"Our skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine."⁴ The Saviour also gives the same affecting view of the power of suffering upon his tender frame—"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws."⁵ Christian! is not this the way, in which the Lord is trying your faith, and training you for higher exercises, and more enduring conflicts? Your very confidence—in that you would rather pine away in affliction, than "make a way of escape" by sin, is the proof of the reality of his own grace in you, and of his faithful love towards you. Think how honourably he manifests your relation to Christ, by causing "his sufferings to abound in you," and making you "bear in your body the marks of the Lord Jesus."⁶ And do you not thus realize, as you could not otherwise do, the sympathy of our High Priest in this his special earthly trial—

¹ Jos. ix. 4. ² Psalm xxxi. 12; cii. 3. Compare Prov. xvii. 22.

³ Job xxx. 30.

⁴ Lam. v. 10.

⁵ Psalm xxii. 15.

⁶ Gal. vi. 17.

“ a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness, and no beauty that he should be desired—despised and rejected of men ”¹ to the end of his days ? Oh, what a supporting cordial to his afflicted people is the sympathy of this suffering, tempted Saviour !²

But to look at David, under his long-continued trials, preserving his recollection of *the Lord's statutes*—what a striking evidence of the presence of his God with him, and the sustaining power of his word under the most afflicting circumstances ! If we then—blessed with much larger Scriptures than he—fail in deriving from them the same support, it can only be, that we do not search them in a dependent, prayerful, and humble spirit—that we do not *simply* look for the revelation of Christ ; to mark his glory, and to increase in the knowledge of Him.”³ In this spirit we should have more to say of the comfort of remembering “ *the Lord's statutes ;* ” and of their upholding influence, when all other stays were found as “ the trust in the shadow of Egypt—shame and confusion.”⁴

Job's history strikingly illustrates both the trial and its sanctified results. When “ scraping himself with a potsherd, and sitting down among the ashes,”—the temporary victim of Satanic power—he might well have taken up the complaint—“ *I am become like a bottle in the smoke.* ” But when in this hour of temptation he was enabled to resist the tempter in the person of his own wife, and commit himself with implicit resignation into the hands of his faithful God—“ What ! shall we receive good at the hand of God ; and shall we not receive evil ? ”⁵—he might with equal propriety have expressed the confidence—“ *yet do I not forget thy statutes.* ”

¹ Isaiah liii. 2, 3.² Heb. iv. 15 ; ii. 18.³ John v. 39.⁴ Isaiah xxx. 1—3.⁵ Job ii. 7—10.

This confidence is indeed an encouraging seal of the Lord's love on our souls. For surely we never should have remembered "*his statutes*," had he not written his covenant promises upon our hearts.¹ This perseverance under protracted trials is also a glorious display of the upholding grace. How much more honourable to our God is it than the desponding complaint—"The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me!"² Let us watch then against that indulgence of proud sullenness under every little trial—such as the coldness of friends, the unkindness of enemies, or the providential dispensations of our heavenly Father. How sinful to allow hard thoughts of him, whose name and character—"without variableness or shadow of turning"—is "Love!" A steady trust in the long and wearisome seasons of tribulations, is indeed to "glorify God in the fires."³ Nothing honours our God so much as this enduring, overcoming faith, persevering in despite of opposition, in destitution of all outward prospects of relief. It is when "against hope we believe in hope, not staggering at the promise of God through unbelief," that we are "strong in faith, giving glory to God."⁴

84. *How many are the days of thy servant? When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?—*
 85. *The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.*

THOUGH in the severe exercise of long-continued affliction, we may be enabled in the steadiness of our confidence "*not to forget the statutes*" of our God; yet we shall hasten to carry our complaint before him—

¹ Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

² Isaiah xlix. 14.

³ Isaiah xxiv. 15.

⁴ Romans iv. 18, 20.

“*How many are the days of thy servant?*”—my days of affliction under the “fury of the oppressor”—“the days of my pilgrimage” in this wilderness of trouble. Here again is the mark of “God’s elect, in crying day and night to our God, though he bears long with us.”¹ Christian! mark this instructive pattern; and, when exposed to the lawless persecutions and devices of “*the proud*,” forget not your hiding-place. God in Christ is your strong hold, “whereunto you may continually resort.” He “*hath given commandment to save you.*”² Your trial has done its appointed work, when it has brought you to him; and inclined you, after your blessed Master’s example, instead of taking the vengeance into your own hands, to commit yourself and your cause “to him that judgeth righteously.”³ ‘And this’—as Archbishop Leighton excellently observes—‘is the true method of Christian patience—that which quiets the mind, and keeps it from the boiling tumultuous thoughts of revenge; to turn the whole matter into God’s hands, to resign it over to him, to prosecute when and as he thinks good. Not as the most, who had rather, if they had power, do for themselves, and be their own avengers; and, because they have not power, do offer up such bitter curses and prayers for revenge unto God, as are most hateful to him, and are far from this calm and holy way of committing matters to his judgment. The common way of referring things to God is indeed impious and dishonourable to him, being really no other than calling him to be a servant and executioner of our passion. We ordinarily mistake his justice, and judge of it according to our own precipitant and distempered minds. If wicked men be not crossed in their designs, and their

¹ Luke xviii. 7.

² Psalm lxxi. 3.

³ 1 Peter ii. 23, and Archbishop Leighton on the passage.

wickedness evidently crushed, just when we would have it, we are ready to give up the matter as desperate, or at least to abate of those confident and reverent thoughts of Divine justice which we owe him. However things go, this ought to be fixed in our hearts, that he that sits in heaven judgeth righteously, and executes that his righteous judgment in the fittest season.'

The acceptance of the cry of the martyrs under the altar,¹ clearly shows "that it is a righteous thing with the Lord to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" his people, "and to them that are troubled, rest."² Some Christians indeed have known but little of trial of "cruel mockings"³ and bitter persecutions. Let such be thankful for the merciful exemption from this "hardness:"⁴ but let them prepare for the conflict. Let none of us, in the determination to "live godly in Christ Jesus" expect to escape "persecution."⁵ Let us "count the cost"⁶ of suffering for Christ, whether we shall be able to abide it. For the mere spiritless notions, or for the unenlivened forms of religion, of which we have never felt the power, nor tasted the sweetness, it would be little worth our while to expose ourselves to inconvenience. But if we have ever understood the grand substantial of the gospel—if we have ever clearly been assured of their reality, practically acknowledged their influence, and experimentally realized their enjoyment, we shall be ready to meet the persecuting malice of "*the proud*" in defence of a treasure dearer to us than life itself. Should we, however, be too rich to part with all for Christ, or too high in the estimation of the world to confess the despised followers of Jesus, it will be no marvel, or rather a marvel of mercy, if the Lord

¹ See Rev. vi. 9—11.

³ Hebrews xi. 36.

⁵ 2 Timothy iii. 12.

² 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

⁴ 2 Timothy ii. 3.

⁶ Luke xiv. 28.

should sweep away our riches, and suffer "*the proud to dig pits for us,*" and to "*have us in derision.*" To make this world "a wilderness or a land of darkness" to us, may be his wisely-ordained means to turn us back to himself as our portion, to his word as our support, to his people as our choice companions, and to heaven as our eternal rest.

86. *All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully: help thou me.*

IN the lengthened duration of the trials of the Lord's people, the "eyes fail with looking upward" the voice of prayer grows faint, and in a moment of weakness the faithfulness of God is almost questioned, as if they should go mourning to the very end of their days. It is at such a season that he, who delights to "comfort them that are cast down,"¹ realizes to the view of faith the unchangeable *faithfulness of the commandments of God* with respect to his people. In this recollection we can "look up and lift up our heads," and "go on our way," if not "rejoicing," yet at least with humble acquiescence; assured that, in the perseverance of faith and hope, we shall ultimately be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."²

Many Old Testament Histories beautifully illustrate the reward of this simplicity of faith in occasions (like David's) of temporal difficulty.³ When Asa's "hands were *made strong* by the *hands of the mighty God of Jacob,*" "*his bow abode in strength.*"⁴ When, at a subsequent period, he "*trusted in man and made flesh*

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 6.

² Romans viii. 37.

³ The examples of Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 10—12, and Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xx. 1—30, may be referred to.

⁴ Gen. xlix. 24.

his arm, and his heart departed from the Lord,"¹ he became, like Samson, "weak, and as another man."² So true is it, that no past communications of Divine strength can stand in the stead of the daily habit of dependence upon the Lord, without which we are utterly helpless, and are overthrown in every conflict. Our best prosperity therefore is to leave our cause in his hands, looking upward in the simplicity of wretchedness for his help—"All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully: help thou me." Wretched and forlorn I am; but thy truth is my shield.'

Believer! This is your only posture of resistance. Should you enter the field of conflict without this "shield of faith," some crevice will be found in your panoply, through which a "fiery dart" will inflict a poisonous wound.³ But how can faith be exercised without a distinct acquaintance with the object of faith? We cannot repose trust or expect help, in an unknown God—in an offended God, whom every day's transgression has made our enemy. There must, then, be reconciliation, before there can be help. Those, therefore, who are unreconciled by the death of Christ, send up their cries for help to a God, who does not hear, accept, or answer them. But when Christ is known as "the peace," and the way of access to God, what instance can there be of trial or difficulty, when our reliance upon the Lord will fail? Not indeed that we shall always return from the throne of grace with the wished-for relief. We may have brought our burden, and laid it before the Lord; and yet through distrust or unbelief have neglected to leave it with him. Oh! let us remember, when we go to Jesus, that we go

¹ Compare Jer. xvii. 5—8.

² Judges xvi. 7, with 2 Chron. xvi. 7.

³ Eph. vi. 16.

to a tried, long-proved, and faithful friend. Dependence upon him is the only successful conflict. The "good fight" is the fight "of faith."¹ We are best able to resist our enemy upon our knees; and such a prayer as this—"Help thou me," will bring down the strength of Omnipotence on our side. We might as well expect to crush a giant with a straw, as to enter the spiritual conflict with weapons of carnal warfare. The experience of every trial realizes more clearly the help of a faithful Saviour. He does indeed deliver gloriously; and leaves us nothing to do but stand still, wonder and praise—"Fear ye not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you to-day; for the Egyptians, whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever."²

87. *They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.*

AND why did they not quite consume him? Because "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him."³ "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."⁴ And why have not our spiritual enemies "*consumed us upon earth?*" "Satan hath desired to have us, that he may sift us as wheat." "But," saith the Saviour, "*I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.*"⁵ "My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."⁶ Neither long-continued

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 12.

² 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

³ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

⁴ Exod. xiv. 13.

⁵ Psalm lxxvi. 10.

⁶ John x. 28.

distress,¹ nor determined opposition,² could turn the Psalmist's feet from the ways of God. He would rather "forsake" all that his heart held dear upon earth, than "the precepts" of his God. And thus, the child of God, with whatever intensity of affection he loves father and mother, (and the influence of the Gospel has increased the sensibilities of his relative affections,) remembers who hath said—"He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me."³ Unlike the deluded professor,⁴ he has counted the cost of the tribulation and persecution of the Gospel; and the result has only served to confirm his love and adherence to his heavenly Master.

When we are tempted to neglect *the precepts*; or when we fail to live in them, and to delight in them, it would be well to bring our hearts to this test—'What would I take in exchange for them? Will the goodwill and approbation of the world compensate for the loss of the favour of God? Could I be content to forego my greatest comforts, to "suffer the loss of all things,"⁵ yea, of life itself,⁶ rather than forsake one of the ways of God? When I meet with such precepts as link me to the daily cross, can I throw myself with simple dependence upon that Saviour, who has engaged to supply strength for what he has commanded?' How often in times of spiritual temptation, if not of temporal danger, "*they had almost consumed us upon earth;*" but "*in the mount*" of difficulty "the Lord has been seen."⁷ Oh! let each of us mark our road to Zion with multiplied Ebenezers, inscribed Jehovah-jireh—Jehovah-nissi⁸—

¹ Verse 83.² Verses 84—86.³ Matt. x. 37.⁴ Matt. xiii. 21.⁵ Phil. iii. 8.⁶ Acts xx. 24.⁷ 'In the Mount the Lord shall be seen, or shall appear, Jehovah-jireh.' (Gen. xxii. 14.)—*Scott, in loco.*⁸ Exod. xvii. 15.

“By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.”¹

What a view does this testimony give of the upholding power of the grace of God! In themselves as weak as worms, how could believers stand against such an appalling array of hostile power? Yet it is a great, but a true word, suitable for a babe in Christ as well as for an Apostle—“I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.”² Yes, I can “wrestle even against principalities and powers” of darkness, if I be “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.”³

88. *Quicken me after thy loving kindness: so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.*

“GOD, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”⁴ But do we not *daily* need to be constantly “*quickened after*” the same “*loving kindness*” of our God? For every breath of prayer, Divine influence must flow—“*Quicken us, and we shall call upon thy name.*”⁵ For the work of praise, without the same influence we are dumb. Hence the supplication at the close of this psalm—“*O let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.*”⁶ For the exercise of every spiritual grace there must be the cry—“*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*”⁷ Thus is the creature laid in the dust, and all

¹ Psalm xli. 11, 12.

² Eph. vi. 10, 12.

⁵ Psalm lxxx. 18.

² Phil. iv. 13.

⁴ Eph. ii. 4, 5.

⁷ Cant. iv. 16.

⁶ Verse 175.

the glory is given to God. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." ¹

Why is it then that at one time we spring to duty as the joy of our life, while at other times we are so chained down under the power of corruption, that we scarcely can put forth the feeblest exercise of the renewed nature? The source of our life is the same—"hid with Christ in God." ² But the power of the flesh hinders its every motion. ³ Hence the frequent returns of spiritual sloth, backwardness to prayer, and disrelish for heavenly things—sins deeply humbling in themselves, and aggravated by the neglect of the plentiful provision laid up in Christ, not only for the life, but for the peace and joy of the soul. When therefore our supplies from this fulness are straitened by indolence or unbelief, let the prayer for the reviving influence of the Spirit be more urgently awakened—"Quicken me after thy loving kindness." A spirit of self-confidence too often paralyses our spiritual energy. We expect our recovery from a lifeless state by some more determined resolutions of our own, or some increased improvement of the various means of grace. Let these means indeed be used with all diligence, but with the fullest conviction, that all means, all instruments, all helps of every kind, without the influence of the Spirit of grace, are dead. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." ⁴

These records of David's prayers strikingly mark the intensity of his desire to live to God. Every decay of strength and activity was as it were death to him, and stirred up the reiterated cry for quickening

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

² See Gal. v. 17.

³ Col. iii. 3.

⁴ John vi. 63.

grace. Oh! let us mourn over our own short-comings in Christian devotedness; and for our own sake, for the Lord's sake, for the church's and the world's sake sigh for a revival in our souls. Let our petitions be incessant, each one for himself—"quicken me"—Quicken this slothful heart of mine. Enkindle afresh the sacred spark within, and let me be all alive for thee. Let faith be kept alive and active at the throne of grace, and all will be alive; our obligation will be deeply felt and practically acknowledged.

The title here given to the directory of our duty—"the testimony of God's mouth"—gives increasing strength to our obligations. Thus let every word we read or hear be regarded as coming directly from the "mouth of God."¹ What reverence, what implicit submission does it demand! May it ever find us in the posture of attention, humility, and faith, each one of us ready to say—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!"²

¹ Compare Judges iii. 20.

² 1 Sam. iii. 9, 10.

PART XII.

89. *For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.—*

90. *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations; thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.—*91. *They continue this day according to thine ordinances, for all are thy servants.*

THE Christian extends his survey far beyond the limits of his individual sphere. His view of the operations of God in creation enlarges his apprehensions of the Divine attributes, and especially that of unchanging *faithfulness*. Indeed, the very fact of a creation in ruins—a world in rebellion against its Maker, failing of the grand end of existence, and yet still continued in existence, manifests “*his faithfulness unto all generations.*” How different is the contemplation of the Christian from the philosopher! the desire to establish his ground of faith upon some new discovery of *the faithfulness of God*. Mark his glorying in the manifestation of the unchangeableness of the Divine word—“*concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever. Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*”¹ How striking is the contrast between the transient glory of man’s godliness, and the solid obedience of all the promises, hopes, and prospects of the children of God! “*The grass withereth, and the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*”²

¹ Verses 152, 160.

² Isaiah xl. 6—8. Compare 1 Peter i. 24, 25.

“Unbelief” is the character of our “evil hearts.”¹ Man chooses his own measure and objects of faith, he believes no more than he pleases. But it is a fearful prospect, that the threatenings of God rest upon the same solid foundation with his promises. “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”² *The continuance of “all things as they were from the beginning of the creation”*³ is at once a token of his covenant with nature, that “while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease;”⁴ and an emblem of his covenant with the seed of David, that he “will not cast them off for all that they have done.”⁵ So that every view of the heavens shews the unchangeableness of his everlasting covenant, and the security of the salvation of his own people.

In this widely-extended universe, “*all are his servants.*” “The stars in their courses”—“fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy winds—fulfil his word. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly.”⁶ Man—the child of his Maker⁷—“created in his image”⁸—destined for his glory⁹—is the only rebel and revolter in the earth. Most affecting is the appeal, that his own Father and God is constrained to make concerning him; “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!”¹⁰

¹ Hebrews iii. 12.

² 2 Peter iii. 4.

³ Jeremiah xxxi. 35, 36 xxxiii. 20, 21, 25, 26.

⁴ Judges v. 20. Psalm cxlviii. 8; cxlvii. 15.

⁵ Deut. xxxii. 6.

⁶ Isaiah xliiii. 7.

² Comp. Luke xxi. 28—33.

⁴ Genesis viii. 22.

⁸ Genesis i. 27; v. 1.

¹⁰ Ib. i. 2.

Let this contemplation teach us the end for which we are created—“*to be his servants.*” Let it shew us the reason “that we are not consumed,”—“I am the Lord: I change not.”¹ Let it warn sinners, how vain are their secret hopes, that God’s word will fail of accomplishment—“*For ever, O Lord! thy word is settled in heaven.*” Let it remind the Lord’s people of the security of their hopes—“*Thy faithfulness is unto all generations.*” For I have said—Mercy shall be built up for ever; “thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.”² The decrees of the kings of the earth, “settled” on earth, are exposed to all the variations and weakness of a changing world. They may be revoked by themselves or their successors, or they may die away. The empty sound of the “law of the Medes and Persians that altereth not,”³ has long since been swept away into oblivion. But while “the word settled” on earth has “waxed old like a garment, and perished;” “*the word settled in heaven*”—is raised above all the revolutions of the universe, and remaineth as the throne of God—unshaken and eternal; exhibiting the foundation of the believer’s hope and of the unbeliever’s terror, to be alike unalterably fixed.

But we also remark the foreknowledge as well as the *faithfulness* of God. From the eternity that is past, as well as for the eternity that is to come, “*thy word is settled in heaven.*” Before this fair creation was marred, yea, before it was called into existence, its ruin was foreseen, and a remedy provided. “The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world,”⁴ and fore-ordained before⁵ that era. Coeval with this

¹ Malachi iii. 6.

² Psalm lxxxix. 2.

³ Daniel vi. 8.

⁴ Rev. xiii. 8.

⁵ 1 Peter i. 20.

period, a people were "chosen in him,"¹ and "*for ever the word was settled in heaven*"—"All that the Father giveth me *shall come to me.*"² For the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth, "the decree is declared," however earth and hell may combine—"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Sion."³ And what a blessed encouragement to perseverance in the grand work of bringing back "the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"⁴ and those "other sheep" with them, "which are not of this fold"⁵ is it that we do not depend upon the earnestness of our prayers, the wisdom of our plans, and the diligence of our endeavours; but upon "the word" which "*is for ever settled in heaven!*"

"The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, *saith the Lord.* As for me, this is my covenant with them, *saith the Lord—My Spirit this is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.*"⁶

"I have sworn by myself, *the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return,—That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*"⁷

92. *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.*

DAVID had just spoken⁹ of the sure basis of the word. He now remembers its Divine support—and

¹ Ephesians i. 4.

² Psalm ii. 6—8.

⁵ John x. 16.

³ John vi. 37.

⁴ Matthew xv. 24.

⁷ Ib. xlv. 23.

⁶ Isaiah lix. 20, 21.

that at the time when he most needed it—in affliction. How many a false professor has been tried and cast by this hour of “*affliction*”! But the true Christian—who has been sifted by temptation—who has “endured the hardness” of persecution, as a “good soldier of Jesus Christ”¹—and who is ready rather to be “*consumed upon earth*,”² than to shrink from his profession—this is the man, whom his Master “will lift up, and not make his foes to rejoice over him.”³ It is the established rule of the kingdom of Christ—“Them that honour me I will honour.”⁴ “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”⁵

How full are the provisions of support in *the law* or revelation of God—a full inheritance of the power, love, wisdom, faithfulness of God. This is God himself, coming to us in the person, and by the voice of his dear Son, and speaking peace—*not as the world giveth*.⁶ The world indeed has no conception of *the delights* of this *law*, when bowed down and overwhelmed with accumulated afflictions. However the believer’s real character may be hidden from the world, the hour of trial abundantly proves, both what the *law* can do for him, and what a lost creature he would have been without it. In affliction, friends mean well; but of themselves they can do nothing. They can only look on, feel, and pray. They cannot speak to the heart. This is God’s prerogative:⁷ and his word is his voice.

¹ 2 Timothy ii. 3.

² Psalm xxx. 1.

⁵ Rev. iii. 10.

² Verse 87.

⁴ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

⁶ John xiv. 27.

⁷ Hosea ii. 14. Margin.

But for the support of the word of God, Jonah probably would have "*perished in his affliction.*" In the belly of the fish, as "in the belly of hell," he appears to have recollected the experience of David under deep and awful desertion; and in taking his language out of his mouth, as descriptive of his own dark and terrific condition, a ray of light and hope darted upon his dungeon walls.¹ Indeed it is a mystery how a sinner, destitute of the support and comfort of the word of God, can uphold himself in his trials. We cannot wonder, that he should often "*perish in his affliction;*" "his soul choosing strangling and death rather than his life."²

But in order to derive support from the word, it must be "*our delights.*"³ And for this the mere formal reading of it is utterly ineffectual. Who ever tasted its tried consolations in the mere performance of the outward duty? No—let it be simply received, diligently searched, and earnestly prayed over. Light will thus be vouchsafed to guide the heavy-laden to Him, who is the soul's present and eternal rest.⁴ Then will its heavenly support and elevated enjoyment be fully manifested. It will be read as a reality, and

¹ Jonah ii. 3, with Psalm xlii. 7. The phraseology in the 70th is identical, as if it were a clear and distinct recollection of the Psalmist's expressions, when describing his own state of desertion.

² Job vii. 15.

³ 'Delights'—*instar omnium*—instead of all manner of delights.

⁴ Matt. xi. 28. It was the speech of a holy man—after God had made this precious text the messenger to open his dungeon of spiritual distress, and bring him into the light of inward joy—that he had better be without meat, drink, light, air, earth, life, and all, than without this one comfortable Scripture. 'If one single promise'—as Gurnal sweetly remarks in giving this story—'like an ear of corn rubbed in the hand of faith, and applied by the Spirit of Christ—can afford such a full satisfying meal of joy to the hunger-bitten pining soul; Oh what price can we set upon the whole field of Scripture, which stands so thick with promises every way as cordial as this!' Gurnal on Ephesians vi. 17.

taken as a cordial. The tempest-tossed soul will cast anchor upon it—"Remember the word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope."¹ Each promise of the word will be found a staff, able—if we have faith to lean upon it—to bear the whole weight of sin, and care, and trial.

It seems, however, that "*affliction*" is our appointed lot. "Man is born"—and the child of God is twice born—"to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."² But enriched, and invigorated, and established by the power of the law of his God, he is borne up above all that weakness, and weariness of the flesh. Christian! "let the word of Christ dwell in you *richly* in all wisdom."³ Let those parts of it be the main subject of your meditation,⁴ which mark his person,⁵ his character, offices,⁶ life,⁷ sufferings,⁸ and death,⁹ resurrection and glory,¹⁰ together with the promises, encouragements, and prospects directly flowing from this blessed subject—and oh! what a treasure-house will you find richly furnished with every source of delight, and every ground of support!

93. *I will never forget thy precepts; for with them thou hast quickened me.*

An admirable resolution to form! the blessed fruit of the quickening power of the word in his deep affliction. He had before acknowledged this supernatural efficacy—"Thy word hath quickened me."¹¹ Now he more distinctly mentions it, as the *instrumental*

¹ Verse 49.

² Job v. 7.

³ Col. iii. 16.

⁴ Such as Isaiah liii. which in the compass of a single chapter sketches out his whole history. See below.

⁵ Isaiah liii. 1, 2.

⁶ Ib. ver. 4, 5, 12.

⁷ Ib. verse 3.

⁸ Ib. verses 7, 8.

⁹ Ib. verse 9.

¹⁰ Ib. ver. 10—12.

¹¹ Verse 50.

only—not the *efficient—cause*—“*With them thou hast quickened me.*” We must trace, therefore, the principle and exercise of the spiritual life to no other source than the Almighty Spirit of God opening our hearts to receive and love *the precepts of God*. Had the power been in the word, the same effect would have invariably followed. Nor should we have been constrained to lament the limited extent of this quickening influence. You remember, Christian! how many shared with you in the outward privileges of the means of grace; but perhaps unto none was the life-giving influence vouchsafed, save unto yourself—the most unlikely—the most unworthy of all.¹ This was the sovereign grace of God. And have not these same “*precepts*” been often since as “wells of salvation,” channels of life, refreshment, and consolation; lively in themselves, and lively to your soul? Surely then you have reason to say—“*I will never forget thy precepts.*” The leaves of the word of God—so to speak—are the leaves of the tree of life, as well as of the tree of knowledge. They not only enlighten the path, but they supply life for daily walk and progress. “The words that I speak unto you”—said Jesus—“*they are spirit, and they are life;*”² so that we cannot forget the precepts, as the channel by which our spiritual life is exerted and maintained.

Men of the world, however, with accurate recollections of all matters connected with their temporal advantage, are remarkably slow in retaining the truths of God’s words. They complain of their short memories, and rest in what they imagine a natural infirmity—although conscious that this excuse does not extend to their important secular engagements. But what wonder is it, that their memories are so treacherous?

¹ Compare Luke iv. 25, 26.

² John vi. 63.

The word of God is not precious to them : they acknowledge no obligation to it : they have no acquaintance with it. It has no place in their affections, and therefore but little abode in their remembrance.

But this resolution is the language of sincerity—not of perfection. The child of God is humbled in the consciousness of *daily* “*forgetfulness of the Lord’s precepts.*” And this consciousness keeps his eye fixed upon Jesus for pardon and acceptance ; while every fresh sense of acceptance strengthens his more habitual remembrance. Then as for his natural inability to preserve upon his mind an accurate recollection of Divine things—let him not estimate the benefit of the word by the results in the memory, so much as by the impressions upon the heart. The word may have darted through the mind, as a flash of lightning that strikes and is gone ; and yet the heart may have been melted, and the passing flash may have shed a heavenly ray upon a dubious path. If the heart retains the quickening power, “*the precepts are not forgotten,*” even though the memory should have failed to preserve them.

But whatever word of conviction, direction, or encouragement, may have come to us, let this special seal be affixed to it—‘*I will never forget thy precepts.*’ It may be of signal use in some hour of temptation. The same Spirit that breathed before upon the word, may breathe again ; if not with the same present sensible power, yet with a seasonable and refreshing recollection of past support.

94. *I am thine ; save me ; for I have sought thy
precepts.*

WHAT a high and honourable character is stamped upon the meanest believer ! He is the Saviour's unalienable property,¹ and portion,² the "workmanship"³ of his hand, the purchase of his blood,⁴ the triumph of his conquering love.⁵ He is given to him by his Father⁶— "preserved in himself and called."⁷ The evidence of his character is found in "*seeking the Lord's precepts.*" "Whom we serve" will prove "whose we are."⁸ "His servants ye are, to whom ye obey."⁹ "Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself."¹⁰ "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh" can have no natural inclination towards the Lord's precepts.¹¹ A new and spiritual bias, therefore, is the visible stamp and seal of the Lord's interest in us.

True it is, that our Divine Saviour can never be robbed of his property—that his people are securely saved in him, beyond the reach of earth and hell to touch them. But though saved, they are yet dependent, always sinners—every day from yesterday's provocation more sinners than before ; needing, therefore, from day to day, fresh power, fresh keeping, and above all, fresh cleansing and acceptance. And therefore the child of God draws his daily plea for mercy from the Lord's interest in him. "*I am thine ; save me.*" Thou

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 23.

² Deut. xxxii. 9.

³ Eph. ii. 10.

⁴ Psalm lxxiv. 2. Acts xx. 28. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

⁵ Isaiah liii. 10—12. ⁶ John vi. 37 ; x. 29 ; xvii. 6, 11.

⁷ Jude 1.

⁸ Acts xxvii. 23.

⁹ Rom. vi. 16.

¹⁰ Deut. x. 15.

¹¹ Rom. vii. 5.

hast saved me; "thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling?"¹ Save me from the love of sin, from the daily guilt and power of sin; from the treachery of my own foolish heart; from all this, and all besides, which thou seest ensnaring to my soul. If I am not thine, whence this desire, this endeavour to "*seek thy precepts?*" What mean my privileged moments of communion with thee? What mean the yet unsatisfied desires after a conformity to thine image? Lord, I would humbly plead thine own act, thy free and sovereign act, that made me thine. Save me; because thou hast brought thy salvation near to me, and sealed me thine. I need mercy to begin with me: mercy to accompany me: mercy to abide with me for ever. "*I am thine; save me.*"

And what irresistible energy does it give to our pleading with God, when we remember, that the object of our supplications was the sole purpose that brought down the Son of God from heaven! "I came down"—said he—"from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. *And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing.*"² Of this purpose he was enabled to testify at the conclusion of his work—"*Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.*"³

Can we then bring our character to this test, that we "*seek his precepts?*" Is it the way in which we love to walk? Then let us not desist from our plea before God, until our heart listens to the voice of love, centering every blessing of creation, redemption, and heavenly calling, in the privilege of adoption. "Thus

¹ Ps. lxxvi. 13.² John vi. 38, 39.³ Ib. xvii. 12; xviii. 9.

saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name; *thou art mine. Thou art my servant*; O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions; and as a cloud, thy sins.”¹ I have regarded this thy plea. I have heard this thy prayer—*“I am thine: save me.”*²

95. *The wicked have waited for me to destroy me; but I will consider thy testimonies.*

THOUGH the believer is safe as the Lord’s property, and in the Lord’s keeping; yet the ungodly as the instruments of Satan, will not cease to distress him. The Psalmist had before alluded to this trial, as driving him to his refuge.³ And, indeed, this is the constant character of the believer’s walk—enduring the enmity of the ungodly world, and seeking his refuge in the word of God—in that hiding place of safety to which the word directs him; a striking proof of the irreconcilable variance between the world and God! All that is most contrary to God is encouraged by the spirit of the world; while God’s own image in his people is persecuted and despised. Yet the word of God opens to the believer a sure defence. His “soul is among lions;”⁴ but he can testify to the astonishment of the world—“My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me.”⁵ He hears indeed the roaring of the winds and

¹ Isaiah xliii. 1; xlv. 21, 22.

² The same plea is urged in prayer, Psalm cxliii. 12; lxxxvi. 2. Margin. Compare also verse 125.

³ Verses 78, 87.

⁴ Psalm lvii. 4.

⁵ Daniel vi. 22.

waves ; but he hears also the voice speaking to his agitated mind, "Peace, be still."¹

The experience of this trial and support beautifully illustrates the promise, "He that believeth shall not make haste."² He whose hope is firmly fixed on that "tried corner-stone," which God himself hath "laid in Zion as a sure foundation"—"shall not be greatly moved;" nay, he "shall not be moved"³ at all, by the machinations of "*the wicked waiting for him to destroy him.*" In the hour of approaching difficulty, instead of perplexing himself with successive expedients for his safety (sought more from human contrivance, than from asking counsel at the mouth of God), he "possesses his soul in patience," and calmly commits all events to the Lord. Such a man "shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."⁴ "This trust is grounded on the word of God, revealing his power and all-sufficiency, and withal his goodness, his offer of himself to be the stay of the soul, commanding us to rest upon him. People wait on I know not what persuasions and assurances: but I know no other to build faith on, but the word of promise. The truth and faithfulness of God opened up his wisdom and power and goodness, as the stay of all those that, renouncing all other props, will venture on it, and lay all upon him. "He that believes, sets to his seal that God is true:" and so he is sealed for God; his portion and interest secured. "If you will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."⁵

But it is the "*considering* of the Lord's testimonies," that draws out these blessings of refuge and comfort.

¹ Mark iv. 39.

² Isaiah xxviii. 16.

³ Psalm lxii. 2, 6. His confidence seems to have increased in the recollection of his support—"I shall not be *greatly* moved—I *shall not be moved.*"

⁴ Psalm cxii. 7.

⁵ Leighton's Works, iii. 256, 257.

The habit of the soul must be fixed upon them, as "tried words, purified seven times in the fire."¹ And in this frame of mind the child of God is enabled to say, "*I will*," under all distresses, all circumstances of trial, or even of dismay, "*consider thy testimonies*"—" *I will consider*" the faithfulness of those blessed declarations—"There shall not an hair of your head perish. Touch not mine anointed."² For "he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye."³ With this armour of defence—this stay of support—I shall not be afraid, even should I hear the "evil tidings," that "*the wicked have waited for me to destroy me.*" Or even if I should be destroyed, I know that thy testimonies cannot fail. I know that my rock is perfect—"that there is no unrighteousness in him;"⁴ and therefore, "though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."⁵ Whether, then, I am delivered from the wicked, and "live—I live unto the Lord;" or whether I fall into their snare, and "die—I die unto the Lord"⁶ for "*I will consider thy testimonies*," and rest assured, that all thy purposes shall be accomplished concerning me, as thou hast said "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."⁷ "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee."⁸

¹ Psalm xii. 7, P. Trans.

³ Zech. ii. 8.

⁵ Ib. xxvii. 3.

⁷ Hebrews xiii. 5.

² Luke xxi. 18. Psalm cv. 15.

⁴ Psalm xcii. 15.

⁶ Romans xiv. 8.

⁸ Isaiah xxvi. 3.

96. *I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

A DEEPER insight into the character of the Lord's "*testimonies*" is the sure result of "*considering*" them. The believer marks them to be stamped with a "*perfection*," to which no words or works of man can put in their claim. Often does the world, with its boasted stores of wisdom and enjoyment, extort this confession from its votaries—" *I have seen an end of all perfection.*" "In much wisdom is much grief."¹ Its sources of happiness are equally unsubstantial. After they have feasted on its delicacies, mixed in all its indulgences, and, like the King of Jerusalem, "not withheld from their heart any joy," their judgment pronounces the verdict—"Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit!"² All that it can offer is a bubble—a shadow. And yet such is the reluctance of the heart towards God, that the world is first tried to the very uttermost, before any desire to return homeward is felt or expressed. And even then, nothing but the Almighty power of God can bring the sinner back. He would rather perish in his misery, than "return to his rest."

But how striking is the contrast between the emptiness of the world and the fulness of "*the commandment of God.*" Our whole duty to our God, our neighbour, and ourselves, is here laid open before us—commanding without abatement, and forbidding without allowance—making no excuse for ignorance, frailty, or forgetfulness—reaching—not only to every species of crime, but to every thing tending to it. This is

Ecc. i. 18.

² Ib. ii. 10, 11.

“*perfection,*” of which we never “*see an end.*” Every fresh view opens—not the extent—but the immensity of the field; and compels us at length to shut up our inquiries with the adoring acknowledgment—*Thy commandment is exceeding broad.* Its various parts form one seamless piece; so that no particle can be separated without injury to the whole. As all the curtains of the tabernacle, connected by taches and loops, made but one covering for the ark, and the loosening or disjunction of the smallest point disannulled the fitness of the whole; so it belongs to the perfection of the commandment of God, that “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”¹ The spirituality of its requirements is equally illustrative of its Divine “perfection.” An angry look is murder,² an unchaste desire is adultery,³ the “stumbling-block of iniquity”⁴—“covetousness”⁵ in the heart is idolatry; the thought⁶ as well as the act, the first conception of sin, as well as the after commission, brings in the verdict—Guilty—Death.

Can the Christian, then, endure the sight of its “*exceeding breadth?*” Yes—For he knows who it is that hath stood in his place—that hath fulfilled its unalterable requisitions, and borne its awful curse.⁷ As a covenant, therefore, it has lost its terrors. As a rule, he loves it for its extent, and for its purity, for the comprehensiveness of its obligations, and for the narrowness of its liberty for indulgence. He would not wish to be subject to a less severe scrutiny, or a more lenient administration.

Reader! if you have learnt “*the exceeding breadth*”

¹ James ii. 10, 11.

² Matt. v. 21, 22. Comp. 1 John iii. 15.

³ Matt. v. 27.

⁴ Ezekiel xiv. 7.

⁵ Ephes. v. 5.

⁶ Prov. xxiv. 9. Compare xxiii. 7.

⁷ Gal. iv. 4, 5; iii. 13.

and spirituality of the law, (the first lesson that is taught and learnt in the school of Christ) your views of yourself and your state before God will be totally changed. Before, you were "thanking God" in your heart, "that you were not as other men are." Now you will be "smiting upon your breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!"¹ Before, perhaps, you might have thought yourself, "touching the righteousness which is of the law, blameless." Now you will glory in your new and more enlightened choice—"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."² Once you considered yourself "alive," when you were really dead. Now that "the commandment is come" in its heart-searching spirituality and conviction to your soul, you "die"³ that you may live. Blessed change from the law to the gospel—"from death to life!" "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."⁴

¹ Luke xviii. 9—13.

³ Romans vii. 9. •

² Phil. iii. 6, 7.

⁴ Gal. ii. 19.

PART XII.¹

97. *Oh! how love I thy law! it is^a my meditation all
the day.*

MARK the man of God giving utterance to his feelings of heavenly delight—expressing most by intimating, that he cannot adequately express what he desires. He seems as if he was unable to restrain his acknowledgments of Divine influence springing up in his heart—“*Oh! how love I thy law!*” This experience is most distinctive of a spiritual character. The professor may read, and understand, and even may *externally* obey the law; but the believer only *loves* it; and he lives in it, as if he could not live without it. To the professor it is a task imposed to satisfy conscience. “The veil upon the heart”² darkens all his spiritual apprehension, and consequently excludes spiritual delight. To the child of God it is food and medicine, light and comfort—yea, “life from the dead.” If it be a law of precept in the word, it is a “law of liberty”³—a law of love—in his heart. His former obedience was the bondage of fear. But how different is the effect of constraining love! He now delights to view it in every lineament. He dwells upon every feature with intense enjoyment. Before, it was confinement—his chain. Now, it is his liberty—his ornament. The man is not what he was—“Old things are passed away: behold all things are become new.”⁴

¹ ‘ I enjoyed a solemn seriousness in learning Mem in the 119th Psalm.’—Martyn’s Journals, vol. i. p. 191.

² 2 Cor. iii. 15.

³ James i. 25.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 17.

There always has been good reason to "*love the law.*" It has ever been the mirror that has reflected Christ to his Church. The spiritual eye discerns him in every part.¹ Do you—Reader—search for him in his law? Do you "*love his law,*" because it "*testifies of him*"? Do you pray for his Spirit, that his law may guide you ~~to him~~? This is the evidence, that you have "*turned unto the Lord, when the veil is taken away,*" and you "*with open unveiled face behold in this glass the glory of the Lord.*"²

But love fastens the soul to the beloved object: "*Oh! how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*"³ When you cannot have it in your hand, it will be found, if indeed your soul is in a prosperous state, "*hid in your heart.*" There it is kept as your most precious treasure—while you live upon it with unwearied appetite as your daily bread, and exercise yourself in it as the rule of your daily walk. Oh, how worthy is it of all the love of the warmest heart! Those who have attained the most extended acquaintance with it, feel their want of suitable enlargement to be a subject of constant and most humiliating regret.

¹ John v. 39. 'Were I to enjoy Hezekiah's grant, and to have fifteen years added to my life, I would be much more frequent in my applications to the throne of grace. Were I to renew my studies, I would take my leave of those accomplished triflers—the historians, the orators, the poets of antiquity—and devote my attention to the Scriptures of truth. I would sit with much greater assiduity at my Divine Master's feet, and desire to know nothing but "Jesus Christ and him crucified." This wisdom, whose fruits are peace in life, consolation in death, and everlasting salvation after death—this I would trace—this I would seek—this I would explore through the spacious and delightful fields of the Old and New Testament.' Such was the testimony of one who had cultivated the classic fields with no inconsiderable success, and who above most men had enriched his soul with the glorious treasures of the word of God—whose praise is in all the churches as the Author of 'Theron and Aspasio.'

² 2 Corinthians iii. 15—18.

³ Psalm i. 2.

This habit of love and holy meditation will spread its influence over our whole character. It will fill our hearts with heavenly matter for prayer, diffuse a sweet savour over our earthly employments, sanctify the common bounties of providence,¹ realize the presence of God throughout the day, command prosperity upon our lawful undertakings,² and enlarge our usefulness in the church of God.³ And thus the man of God is formed in his completeness, symmetry, and attraction—such as the world is often constrained secretly to admire, even where the heart is unready to follow.

Lord! implant in my heart a supreme “*love to thy law.*” Write it upon my heart—even that new law—“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”⁴ May I love it so that I may be always meditating upon it, and by continual meditation yet more enlarging my love and delight in it. So let it prove an ever springing source of heavenly enjoyment and holy conversation!

98. *Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me.—99. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.—100. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.*

WHAT a fruitful harvest did David reap from his “*daily meditation on the law of God!*” He became “*wiser than his enemies*” in “*subtlety,*”⁵—“*than all his teachers*” in doctrine, “*than the ancients*” in experience. Yet he is not here boasting of his own attainments; but commending the grace of God in

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

² Psalm i. 3. Compare Jos. i. 7, 8.

³ 1 Tim. iv. 15.

⁴ Rom. viii. 2.

⁵ Prov. i. 1, 4.

and towards him—“*Thou, through thy commandments hast made me wiser.*” How much more wisdom does the persecuted believer draw from the word of God, than his persecutors have ever acquired from the learning of this world! Those, however, who have been *effectually* taught of God, need to be *daily* taught of him. They are prone to trust to their own wisdom; and though, while they rest upon their God, and seek counsel at his word, they are wise indeed; yet when they turn to their own counsel, they become a by-word and occasion of offence by their own folly. Was David “*wiser than his enemies or his teachers,*” when he dissembled himself to fight against his own people¹—or when he yielded to the indulgence of lust²—or when in the pride of his heart he numbered the people?³ Alas! how often do even God’s children befool themselves in the ways of sin!

But let us mark the means of attaining this Divine wisdom. David gained it—not by habits of extensive reading—not by natural intelligence—but by a diligent use of the word of God. In order to avail ourselves however of this means—a *simple reception of the Divine testimony is of absolute importance*. We can never obtain that assurance of the certainty of our faith, which is indispensable to our peace, or resist the influence of unenlightened “*teachers*”—or of the long-established worldly maxims of “*the ancients,*” *except by entire submission to the supreme authority of Scripture*. Many sincere Christians—especially at the outset of their course—are much hindered—either by the scepticism of others, or of their own minds; or from their previous habit of studying the Bible in the light of carnal wisdom, or in dependence upon human teaching. Such need special prayer for

¹ 1 Sam. xxvii.² 2 Sam. xi.³ Ib. xxiv.

humility of mind and simplicity of faith, that, under Divine teaching, they may discern that path to glory, which in infinite condescension is made so plain, that “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”¹

In our Christian progress, the habit of meditation in the testimonies, after David’s example, will prove of essential service. For while those who “confer with flesh and blood” cannot have their counsellors always at hand; we, in seeking our wisdom from the word of God, have the best Counsellor “*ever with us,*” teaching us what to do, and what to expect. Obedience also, as well as meditation, is the channel of spirituality. Thus David found *understanding, because he kept the precepts.* David’s Lord has pointed out the same path of light: *If any man will do God’s will, he shall know of the doctrine.*² Obedience is the way of light, of joy, of love. “*Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and worketh righteousness—those that remember thee in thy ways.*”³

Now let us turn in, and inquire—What is our daily use of the word of God? Is its influence ever present—ever practical? Do we prize it as a welcome guest? Is it our delightful companion and guide? Oh! be constant in meditation upon this blessed book. “Eat the word,” when you have “found it; and it will be unto you the joy and rejoicing of your heart.”⁴ The name of Jesus, the great subject of the word, will be more precious—your love will be inflamed⁵—your perseverance established⁶—and your heart enlivened in the spirit of praise.⁷ Thus bringing

¹ Isaiah xxxv. 8.

² John vii. 17.

³ Isaiah lxiv. 5. Compare John xiv. 21—23.

⁴ Jer. xv. 16.

⁵ Psalm xxxix.

⁶ Verses 23, 95.

⁷ Psalm lxxiii. 5, 6.

your mind into close and continual contact with "*the testimonies of God,*" and pressing out the sweetness from the precious volume, it will drop, as from the honey-comb, daily comfort and refreshment upon your heart.¹

101. *I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.*

DAVID'S wisdom was of a practical—not of a mere intellectual or speculative character. It taught him to "*keep the Lord's precepts;*" and in order to this, to "*refrain his feet from every evil way.*" Thus will the believer, as he advances "in wisdom and spiritual understanding," anxiously desire to remove hindrances out of the way. He would "abhor that which is evil," that he might "cleave to that which is good."² He would "abstain from all appearance of evil,"³ lest unconsciously he should be drawn into the atmosphere of sin. He would "hate even the garment spotted by the flesh,"⁴ as fearing the infection of sin worse than death. In the consciousness of the danger of self-deception, he intreats the Lord to "see if there were any wicked way in him."⁵ Thus he is enabled to maintain an upright walk before a

¹ Thus Luther recommends us to 'pause at any verse of Scripture we choose, and to shake, as it were, every bough of it; that, if possible, some fruit at least may drop down to us. Should this mode'—he remarks—'appear somewhat difficult at first, and no thought suggest itself immediately to the mind capable of affording matter for a short ejaculation; yet persevere, and try another and another bough. If your soul really hungers, the Spirit of God will not send you away empty. You shall at length find in one, and that perhaps a short verse in Scripture, such an abundance of delicious fruit, that you will gladly seat yourself under its shade, and abide there, as under a tree laden with fruit.'

² Romans xii. 9.

³ 1 Thess. v. 22.

⁴ Jude 23.

⁵ Psalm cxxxix. 24.

heart-searching God; to “keep himself from his iniquity;”¹ and in dependence upon the promises, and in the strength of the grace of the gospel, to “perfect holiness in the fear of God.”²

Some men indeed, full of self, and full of the world, talk of “*keeping the word*,” when their empty profession too clearly proves their awful ignorance and self-delusion. For the character and testimony of Scripture combine to shew, that, if our hearts have not felt the power of its holiness, we neither know nor keep it. And indeed this is the beautiful peculiarity in the word of God: that, in order to keep it, there must be a separation from sin. The two things are incompatible with each other. The two services are at variance at every point, so that the love of sin must depart, where the love of God is ingrafted in the heart. Yet so strongly are we disposed to every evil way, that it requires the Almighty power of grace to enable us to “*refrain from*” one or another crooked path. Often is the pilgrim (yea, has it not too often happened to ourselves?) stopped and held back in his Christian profession, by a temporary ascendancy of the flesh—by a little license given to sin—or by a relaxed circumspection of walk. At such seasons the blessed privilege of “*keeping the word*” is lost. We are sensible of a declining delight in those spiritual duties, which before were our “chiefest joy.” And “is there not a cause?” Have we not provoked our gracious God by harbouring his enemy in our bosom—~~nay~~, more—by pleading for indulgence for it? Has not “the Holy Spirit been grieved” by neglect, or by some worldly compliance: so that his light has been obscured, and his comforting influence quenched?

¹ Psalm xviii. 23.

² 2 Cor. vii. 1.

No consolations, consistent with the love and power of sin, can ever come from the Lord. For the holiness of the word of God cannot be either spiritually understood, or experimentally enjoyed, but in a consistent Christian walk. And yet such is the blessedness entailed upon a spiritual interest, in this book, that the very expectations of realizing its promises, and of walking in its ways, may operate as a principle of restraint “*from every evil way.*”

But there is no bondage in this restraint from sin. Oh, no! The believer feels sin to be slavery; and therefore deliverance from it is his “perfect freedom.” There is indeed a *legal mode of restraint* much to be deprecated, when the conscience is goaded by sins of omission or of wilfulness; and the man, ignorant or imperfectly acquainted with the way of deliverance in the gospel, hopes to get rid of his burden by a more circumspect walk. But not till he casts it at the foot of the cross, and learns wholly to look to Jesus his deliverer, can he form his resolution upon safe and effectual grounds. Oh, may I therefore seek to abide within a constant view of Calvary! Sin will live everywhere, but under the cross of Jesus. Here it withers and dies. Here rises the spring of that holiness, contrition, and love, which refreshes and quickens the soul. Here then let me live: here let me die.¹

Blessed Lord! Thou knowest that I desire to “*keep thy word.*” Prepare my heart to receive and to retain it. May I so “abide in Christ,” that I may receive the sanctifying help of his Spirit for every

¹ “When I am assaulted by some wicked thought, I then betake me to the wounds of Christ. When my flesh casteth me down, by the remembrance of my Saviour’s wounds, I rise up again. Am I inflamed with lust? I quench that fire with the meditation of Christ’s passion. Christ died for us. There is nothing so deadly, that is not cured by the death of Christ.”—*Augustine.*

moment's need! And while I rejoice in him as my Saviour, may I become daily more sensible of every deviation from the strait path as an "*evil way!*" And may daily grace be given to "*refrain my feet from it,*" "*that I may keep thy word!*"

102. *I have not departed from thy judgments; for thou hast taught me.*

IF "*I have refrained my feet from*" sin—if "*I have not departed from God's judgments*"—to him be all the glory. O my soul! art thou not a wonder to thyself? So prone to depart from God! how is it, that thou art able in any measure to hold on thy way? Because the covenant of the Lord engages thy perseverance,—"*I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*"¹ While conscious of my own corrupt bias to depart, let me humbly and thankfully own the work of Divine grace and teaching. Man's teaching is powerless in advancing the soul one step in Christian progress. The teaching from above is "*the light of life.*"² It gives not only the light, but the principle to improve it. It not only points the lesson, and makes it plain; but imparts the disposition to learn, and the grace to obey. So that now I see the beauty, the pleasantness, the peace, and the holiness of "*the Lord's judgments,*" and am naturally led to delight, and insensibly constrained to walk in them. Oh how much more frequent would be our acknowledgment of the work of God, did we keep nearer to the Fountain-head of life and light!³ How may we trace every declension in doctrine and practice—all our continual

¹ Jer. xxxii. 40. Compare 1 John ii. 27.

² John viii. 12. Comp. Eph. v. 14.

³ Psalm xxxvi. 9.

estrangement from the Lord's judgments—to following our own wisdom, or depending upon human teaching! "Trusting in man" is the departing of the heart from the Lord.¹

Reader! What has been your habit and progress "*in the judgments of God?*" Have you been careful to avoid bye-paths? Has your walk been consistent, steady, advancing "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost?"² If there has been no allowed departure from the ways of God, it has been the blessed fruit of "ceasing from your own wisdom,"³ and resting, in simplicity of faith, upon the promise "written in the prophets—And they shall be all taught of God." And how delightful is the influence of this heavenly teaching, in drawing your heart with a deeper sense of need and comfort to the Saviour! For—as he himself speaks—"every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."⁴ Remember—it was no superior virtue or discernment, that has restrained your departure from God, but—"Thou hast taught me" the way to come to God—the way to abide in him—Christ the way—Christ the end. And his teaching will abide with you.⁵ It will win you by light and by love, and by a conquering power allure and captivate your heart with that delight in his judgments, and fear of offending against them, that shall prove an effectual safeguard in the hour of temptation. Be careful therefore that the teaching of the Lord be not lost upon you. Inquire into your proficiency in his instructive lessons. And do not forget to prize his teaching rod, that loving correction, of which David had felt the blessing,⁶ and which he

¹ Jer. xvii. 5.

² Acts ix. 31.

³ Proverbs xxiii. 4.

⁴ Isaiah liv. 13, with John vi. 45.

⁵ 1 John ii. 24, 27.

⁶ Verse 67.

so often uses, to keep his children from "*departing from his judgments.*"

Lord! do thou lead me by the hand, that I may make daily progress in "*thy judgments.*" Restrain my feet from "perpetual backsliding." Whatever of human instruction may be afforded to me—all will be ineffectual to keep me from "*departing from thy judgments,*" except "*thou teachest me.*" Neither grace received, nor experience attained, nor engagements regarded, will secure me for one moment without continual teaching from thyself.

103. *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey, to my mouth.*

NONE but a child of God could take up this expression. Because none besides has a spiritual taste. Yet how delightfully varied were the exercises of David in this sacred word! Its majesty commanded his reverence.¹ Its sweetness excited his joy. Its holy light keeping his heart close with God,² naturally endeared it to his soul.³ None are in any respect benefitted by an external knowledge of the Gospel. But a spiritual taste is a sure evidence of spiritual health—when the word of God is to us, as it was to David, "*sweeter than honey to the mouth;*" and "*esteemed more than our necessary food.*"⁴ The most accurate description of this taste can convey no just idea of the reality. The highest commendation cannot make the sweetest of honey intelligible to one who has never tasted it. Thus, nothing but experience can convey a just idea of a spiritual taste.

¹ Verse 161.

² Verse 102.

³ Thrice in one short Psalm does he stir up his habit of praise of the word and of the God that gave it. See Psalm lvi. 4, 10.

⁴ Job xxiii. 22.

“Oh taste and see that the Lord is good;”¹ and, having once tasted of his Divine goodness, all the poor joys, which before were sweet to the soul, will be found insipid, distasteful, and even bitter. The apprehensions of Christ by faith, and the enjoyment of faith in communion with him, give an unutterable sweetness to the word. “Unto them that believe, he is precious.”² “His name is as ointment poured forth;”³ and “*the savour of the knowledge of him*”⁴ brings a reviving, that nothing besides could ever impart. Can the awakened sinner hear, that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”⁵—and not be ready to say—“*How sweet are thy words unto my taste? yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth?*” Can the weary soul listen to the invitation to “all that labour and are heavy-laden;”⁶ and not feel the “*sweetness*” of those breathings of love? Who can tell the *sweetness* of those precious *words* to the conflicting, tempted soul—displaying the Divine sovereignty in choosing him,—and the unchanging faithfulness in keeping him, and the almighty power of the Divine will, in the gift of eternal life?⁷ And how can the believer hear his Saviour knock at the door of his heart, calling him to fresh communion with himself;⁸ and not turn to him with the ardent excitement of his love—“All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad?”⁹ The more the Saviour is revealed in his fulness and preciousness to our souls; the more unction and fragrance shall we perceive in that word, which testifies of him in every page. However, as

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 8.⁴ 2 Cor. ii. 14.⁷ John x. 8.² 1 Peter ii. 7.⁵ John iii. 16.⁸ Rev. iii. 20.³ Canticles i. 3.⁶ Matt. xi. 28.⁹ Psalm xlv. 8.

with the natural, so with the spiritual, food. A want of appetite gives disgust, instead of sweetness and refreshment to the word. An indolent reading of it without faith—without desire—without application—or a taste vitiated by contact with the things of sense—deadens the palate—“The full soul loatheth the honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.”¹

But how melancholy is the thought of the multitudes, that hear, read, understand the word, and yet have never tasted its sweetness! Like Barzillai, they have no sense to “discern between good and evil.” Full of the world, or of their own conceits—feeding on the delusive enjoyments of creature comforts—nourishing some baneful corruption in their bosoms²—or cankered with the spirit of formality—they have no palate for the things of God, they are “dead in trespasses and sins.” But if we be hungering and thirsting after the word, “*how sweet is it to the taste!*” We eat, and are not satisfied. We drink, and long to drink again. “If so be we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, as newborn babes,” we shall “desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby.”³ We shall take heed of any indulgence of the flesh, which may hinder the spiritual enjoyment, and cause us to “loathe” even “angels’ food” as “light bread.”⁴ Instead of resting in our present experience of its sweetness, we shall be daily aspiring after higher relish for the heavenly blessing.⁵ And will not this experience be a “witness in ourselves” of the heavenly origin of the word? For what arguments could ever persuade us that honey is bitter at the moment that we are tasting its sweetness?

¹ Prov. xxvii. 7.

² See 1 Peter ii. 1, 2.

³ 1 Peter ii. 2, 3.

⁴ Psalm lxxviii. 25. Numb. xxi. 5.

⁵ *Castæ deliciae meæ sunt Scripturæ tuæ.*—Augustine.

Or who could convince us, that this is the word of man, or the imposture of deceit, when its blessed influence has imparted peace, holiness, joy, support, and rest, infinitely beyond the power of man to bestow? Finally, let us remark this enjoyment, as the spiritual barometer, the pulse of the soul—accurately marking our progress or decline in the Divine life. With our advancement in spiritual health, the word will be increasingly “*sweet to our taste:*” while our declension will be marked by a corresponding abatement in our desires, love, and perception of its delights.

104. *Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.*

MAN’S teaching conveys no *understanding*—God’s teaching not only opens the Scriptures, but “opens the understanding to understand them,” and the heart to feel their heavenly warmth of life.¹ “This spiritual understanding” is connected with the taste of spiritual sweetness,² “*the sweetness of the lips*”—as the wise man observes—“*increaseth learning. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.*”³ Thus, having learned “the principles of the doctrine of Christ,” we are encouraged to “go on to perfection”—“growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ.”⁴ Many inconsistencies belong to the young and half-instructed Christian. But when *through the precepts he gets understanding*, he learns to walk more uniformly and steadily, *abiding in the light*. In this spirit and atmosphere springs up a constant and irreconcilable “*hatred of every false way*”—as contrary to the God he loves;

¹ Comp. Luke xxiv. 45, §2.

² Comp. Proverbs ii. 10, 11.

³ Proverbs xvi. 21, 23.

⁴ Heb. vi. 1. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

and which, though strewed with the flowery "pleasures of sin," is "hard"¹ in its present walk, and ruinous in its certain end.² The love of the "*false ways*" of our own heart's choosing proves our knowledge of the Gospel—if there be any knowledge at all—to be barely speculative and uninfluential. And with regard to them—may we not inquire of those, whose past wanderings justly give weight and authority to their verdict—'What is your retrospective view of these ways?' Unprofitableness. 'What is your present view of them!' Shame. 'What prospect for eternity would the continuance in them assure to you?' "Death."³ Rightly then are they called "*false ways*;" and of those that are found in them it is well said—"This their way is their folly."⁴ For what indeed can it be but the foolishness of folly, to rest in illusive hopes of peace, which can only issue in evils endured, and infinitely greater evils foreboded! The blessing, then, of spiritual knowledge consists in its sanctifying efficacy. "*False ways*" are not only avoided and forsaken, but abhorred; and every deviation into them from the straight path, however pleasing, will be "resisted" even "unto blood."⁵

But let me ask myself—What is my apprehension of the ways of sin? Have I detected the "*false ways*" of my own heart? Little is done in spiritual religion, until my besetting sins are searched out. And let me not be satisfied with forbearance from the outward act. Sin may be restrained, yet not mortified; nor is it enough, that I leave it for the present, but I must renounce it for ever. Let me not part with it as with a beloved friend, with the hope and purpose of renewing my familiarity with it at a

¹ Prov. xiii. 15.² Matt. viii. 13. ³ Phil. iii. 19.³ Rom. vi. 21.⁴ Psalm xlix. 13.⁵ Heb. xii. 4.

“more convenient season:”¹ but let me shake it from me as Paul shook off the viper into the fire, with determination and abhorrence? What! can I wish to hold it? If “*through the precepts of God I have got understanding,*” must not I listen with wakeful attention to that solemn, pleading voice—“Oh! do not this abominable thing that I hate?”² No, Lord; let me “pluck it out” of my heart, “and cast it from me.”³ Oh, for the high blessing of a tender conscience! such as shrinks from the approach, and “abstains from all appearance of evil;”⁴ not venturing to tamper with any self-pleasing way; but “*hating*” it as “*false,*” defiling, destructive! I have marked the apple of my eye—that tenderest particle of my frame—that it is not only offended by a blow or a wound; but that, if so much as an atom of dust find an entrance, it would smart until it had wept it out. Now such may my conscience be—sensitive of the slightest touch of sin—not only fearful of resisting, rebelling, or “quenching the Spirit”—but grieving for every thought of sin, that grieves that blessed Comforter—that tender Friend! To “*hate every false way,*” so as to flee from it, is the highest proof of Christian courage. For never am I better prepared to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,”⁵ than when my conscience is thus set against sin. For it is in fact to be ready to submit to the greatest suffering,* rather than be convicted of unfaithfulness to my God.

Lord! turn my eyes, my heart, my feet, my ways, more and more to thy blessed self.

¹ Acts xxiv. 25.

² Acts xxviii. 5.

³ Jer. xlv. 4.

⁴ Matt. v. 29.

⁵ 1 Thess. v. 22.

⁶ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

PART XIV.

105. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

THE nightly journeys of Israel were guided by a pillar of fire.¹ Our passage in a dark and perilous way is irradiated by the word of God. A benighted traveller needs the "*lamp and the light*"—not only to mark his course, but to direct every successive step. Such is man's need of the word of God. Such is his darkness without it—or even with it, while destitute of faith and the light from above. Except the "*lamp*" be lighted—except the teaching of the Spirit accompany the word—all is "darkness, gross darkness" still. Did we more habitually wait to receive, and watch to improve, the light of the word, we should not so often complain of the perplexity of our path. The light reflected from this source would in most instances determine our steps under infallible guidance.

Yet it may sometimes be a matter of difficulty to trace the light in which we are walking to this heavenly source. *A promise may seem to be applied to my mind, as I conceive, suitable to my present circumstances.* But how may I determine, whether it is "*the lamp*" of the word of God, or some delusive light from him who can at any time, for the accomplishment of his own purpose, transform himself "into an angel of light?" Or if a threatening be impressed upon my conscience, how can I accurately distinguish between the voice of "the accuser of the brethren," and the

¹ Exod. xiii. 21, 22.

warning suggestion of my heavenly guide? The state of my mind, under the circumstances alluded to, will throw light upon this point. If I am living in the indulgence of any known sin, or in the neglect of any known duty—if my spirit is careless, or my walk unsteady, a consoling promise, being unsuitable to my case, even though it awakened some excitement of joy, would be of doubtful application. “*The lamp*” of God, *under the circumstances supposed*, would rather reflect the light of conviction than of consolation. For, though God as a Sovereign may speak comfort when and where he pleases; yet we can only expect him to deal with us according to the general prescribed rules of his own covenant,—which to his backsliding people threatens chastisement, rather than speaks consolation.¹ In a spirit of contrition, however, I should not hesitate to receive a word of encouragement, as *the lamp of God* to direct and cheer my progress; being conscious of that state of feeling, in which the Lord has expressly promised to restore and guide his people.² In the course of the inquiry, the terms and character of the promise might also mark its application to myself. When he “that dwelleth in the high and holy place,” engages to dwell “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,”³ any symptoms of tenderness and humility would naturally lead me to consider this word of promise as sent by my kind and watchful Father, to be “*a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*”

Again—a distinct and experimental view of the Saviour in his promises, endearing him to me, and encouraging my trust on his faithfulness and love—this is manifestly light from above.⁴ Or if I mark the pur-

¹ Comp. Psalm lxxxix. 30—32.

² Comp. Isaiah lvii. 18.

³ Isaiah lvii. 15.

⁴ Comp. 2 Cor. i. 20.

pose of the promise to answer any proper end—to excite or to encourage to any present duty, and that some suitable connexion exists between the duty and the promise; I cannot doubt, but *the lamp of the Lord* is directing my dark and difficult path. For example—when the promise was given to Joshua—“I will not fail thee nor forsake thee;”¹ it was to him, “a word” “fitly spoken” “in a time of need,” so that it seemed almost impossible to misconstrue it. And when the same word was subsequently given in a more general acceptation to the Church, the application was equally clear, as a dissuasive from inordinate attachment to the things of time and sense, and an encouragement to an entire dependence upon the Lord.²

Further—The influences of the promises of God upon my heart and conduct will also enable me clearly to distinguish the light of heaven from any illusion of fancy or presumption. The effect of an *unconditional promise* of deliverance given to the Apostle in a moment of extremity, was exhibited in a diligent use of all the appointed means of safety.³ An *absolute* promise of prolonged life given to Hezekiah when lying at the point of death, produced the same practical result. The exercise of his faith was manifest in a scrupulous attention to the means for the recovery of his health.⁴ Upon the warrant of a general promise of Divine protection, Ezra and the Jews “fasted and besought their God for this.”⁵ Now in these and other instances the practical influence of the word in the way of diligence, simplicity, and prayer, evidently proved its sacred origin. An assurance of safety proceeding from another source, would have been productive of

¹ Joshua i. 5.

³ Acts xxvii. 24, 31.

⁵ Ezra viii. 21—23.

² Hebrews xiii. 5.

⁴ Isaiah xxxviii. 5, 21.

sloth, carelessness and presumption ; and therefore may I not presume the quickening power of the word in an hour of darkness and perplexity, to be the Lord's "*lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path,*" "to guide my feet into the way of peace?"

The same test, applied to the threatenings of the word, will determine the character and the source of the light that dawns upon my path. The impression of a Divine threatening, meeting me in the exercise of a watchful habit, and a humble walk with God, I should at once charge as the suggestion of the great enemy of the soul, who is ever ready to whisper distrust and despondency to the child of God. But in a self-confident, self-indulgent state, I should have as little hesitation in marking a word awakening alarm to be *the light of the word of God*. It would be well for me at such a time to be exercised with fear;¹ not as arguing any insecurity in my state; but as leading me to "great searchings of heart, to increasing watchfulness, humiliation and prayer." "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."² Oh that I may be enabled to make use of this lamp, to direct every step of my heavenly way!

Lord! save me from ever turning my face away from the path, into which thy word would guide me. Enable me to improve the light afforded me in the constant exercise of faith, prudence, and simplicity.

106. *I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgment.*

THE blessing of the guidance of the Lord's word naturally strengthens our resolution to walk in its path.

¹ Compare 1 Cor. ix. 27.

² Prov. vi. 23.

And as if a simple resolution would prove too weak for this way, the Psalmist strengthens it with an oath. Nay more, as if an oath was hardly sufficient security, he seconds it again with a firm resolution—“*I have sworn, and I will perform it.*” ‘There shall be but one will between me and my God; and that will shall be his, not mine.’ Some timid Christians, feeling their constant liability to break their engagements, would think it presumptuous to bind themselves under a solemn oath. And some, perhaps, may have burdened their consciences with unadvised or self-dependent obligations.¹ Still, however, when it is a free-will offering, it is a delightful service, well-pleasing to God. Such it was in the days of Asa, when “*all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them.*”² Vows under the law were both binding and acceptable.³ Nor are they less so—in *their spirit at least*—under

¹ It is related of Mr. Pearce, by his excellent biographer, that at the period of the first awakening of his mind—‘having read Doddridge’s *Rise and Progress of Religion*, he determined formally to dedicate himself to the Lord in the manner recommended in the seventeenth chapter of that work. The form of a covenant there drawn up he also adopted as his own; and that he might bind himself in the most solemn and affecting manner, signed it *with his blood*. But afterwards, failing in his engagements, he was plunged into great distress, and almost into despair.’ On a review of his covenant, he seems to have accused himself of pharisaical reliance upon the strength of his resolutions, and therefore taking the paper to the top of his father’s house, he tore it into small pieces, and threw it from him to be scattered by the wind. He did not, however, consider his obligation to be the Lord’s as thereby nullified; but feeling more suspicion of himself, he depended solely upon the blood of the cross.—*Fuller’s Life of Pearce*, pp. 3, 4. This instance must be considered, not as an example of the entangling nature of covenant engagements, but as an illustration, by way of contrast, of the enlightened deliberation and simplicity with which they should ever be undertaken. See some admirable remarks on this subject from Mr. Newton’s pen.—*Life of Grimshawe*, pp. 16—18.

² 2 Chron. xv. 12—15.

³ Numbers xxx. 1, 2. Deut. xxiii. 21—23.

“the perfect law of liberty.” A holy promise, originating in serious consideration, and established by a more solemn obligation, so far from being repugnant to the liberty of the Gospel, appears to have been enjoined by God himself; ¹ nay—his people are described as animating each other to it, as to a most joyous privilege; ² as a renewed act of faith and daily dedication, in dependence on his own covenant engagement. ³

Yet we would warn the inconsiderate Christian not to entangle his conscience by *multiplied vows* (as if they were—like prayer—a component part of our daily religion;) nor by *perpetual obligation*—whether of restraint or of extraordinary exercises. Let him regard also the necessity of Christian simplicity; in the neglect of which, the strongest resolves against sin have ended in despondency or deeper captivity. There is no innate power in these obligations; and—except they be made in self-renouncing dedication—no acceptance,—no blessing.

But we must not admit the inconsiderateness of the unwary, as a legitimate argument against their importance. If Jephthah was entangled in a rash and heedless vow, ³ David manifestly enjoyed the “perfect freedom” of the “service” of his God, when “binding his soul with a bond” equally fixed, but more advised, in its obligation. ⁴ And have we with “the vows of God upon us,” ⁵ baptismal vows—perhaps also confirmation or sacramental vows—found our souls brought into bondage by these solemn engagements? Have we not felt it possible thus to secure our duty without being ensnared by it? Have not

¹ Isaiah xix. 21. Comp. also Isaiah xlv. 5, and Scott on this verse.

² Jer. l. 4, 5.

³ Judges xi. 35.

⁴ Psalm cxvi. 12—14.

⁵ Psalm lvi. 12.

holy seasons of covenanting with God often restrained our feet from devious paths, and quickened our souls in his service? Daily indeed do we need “the blood of sprinkling” to pardon our innumerable failures, and the Spirit of grace to strengthen us for a more devoted fulfilment of our obligations. But yet in the habit of dependence upon the work and Spirit of Christ, often have these holy transactions realized to us a peace and joy, that leads us to look back upon such times as some of the happiest seasons of our lives. “If” therefore “we sin” in a “perpetual backsliding”¹ from these engagements, it is still our privilege without presumption to believe, that “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.”² And, as for encouragement to expect necessary grace, there is One, who hath said—“My grace is sufficient for thee;”³ and that One has given no less a proof of his interest in us, than by dying for us. Confidently therefore may we trust, that he will “perfect that which concerneth us;”⁴ that he will “work all our works in us”⁵—“to will and to do of his good pleasure.”⁶

Perhaps however “a messenger of Satan” may “buffet us.” ‘Thou hast broken thy bond; now it will be worse with thee than before.’ But did not Jesus die for sins of infirmity, and even of presumption? Does every failing of the wife annul the marriage covenant? So neither does every infirmity or backsliding dissolve our covenant with God. Was our faithfulness the basis of this covenant? Rather, does not “the blood of this covenant”⁷ make constant

¹ Jer. viii. 5.² 1 John ii. 1, 2.³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.⁴ Psalm cxxxviii. 8.⁵ Isaiah xxvi. 12.⁶ Phil. ii. 13.⁷ Hebrews xiii. 20.

provision for our foreseen unfaithfulness? And does not our gracious God overrule even our backsliding for the eventual establishment of a more simple reliance upon himself, and a more circumspect and tender walk before him?

But the tenderly scrupulous consciences will find after all many cases of distressing temptation. Suppose, for example, a Christian has been drawn away from a set season of extraordinary devotion by some unforeseen present duty, or some unlooked-for opportunity of actively glorifying God. Has he then broken his obligation? Certainly not. His engagement was, *or ought to have been, formed* with an implied subserviency to paramount Christian duty. It cannot therefore be impaired by any such providential interference. Yet let it not be a light matter to remove a free-will offering from the altar of our God. Let godly care be exercised to discover the subtle workings of the indulgence of the flesh in the service of God. Let double diligence redeem the lost privilege of more immediate and solemn self-dedication. In guarding against legal bondage, let us not mistake the liberty of the flesh for the liberty of the Gospel. Let us be simple and ready for self-denying service; and the Lord our God will not fail to vouchsafe "some token for good."

"Come" then, my fellow Christian, "and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten"¹ by God; never to be forsaken by us. Let each of us be ready to renew our surrender—"O Lord, truly I am thy servant;" I make an offer of myself to be thy servant. "Thou hast loosed my bonds;"² and now I come to thee. Oh! bind me to thyself with fresh bonds of love, that may

¹ Jeremiah i. 5.

² Psalm cxvi. 16.

never be loosed. Glad am I, that I am any thing—though the meanest of all; that I have any thing, poor and vile as it is, capable of being employed in thy service. I yield myself to thee with my full bent of heart and will, entirely and for ever; asking only that I may be “a vessel meet for the Master’s use.”¹

107. *I am afflicted very much; quicken me, O Lord, according unto thy word.*

It would seem, that the act of covenanting with God, in which this holy saint had just engaged, was connected with a season of deep and protracted trial—I *am afflicted very much*. His sense of entire helplessness, and confidence in the Divine promise clearly shew the self-renunciation and simplicity of faith, with which this solemn consecration had been ordered. At the same time also his determined resolution to “keep” God’s word of obedience, gave boldness to his pleading that God would perform his word of promise—“*Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word.*” And how high the privilege, that we are permitted to pour our troubles into the ear of One, who is able perfectly to enter into, and to sympathize with us in them; “who knoweth our frame,”² who hath himself laid the affliction upon us:³ yea, more than all, who “in all our affliction is” himself “afflicted;”⁴ and who “suffered being tempted, that he might be able to succour them that are tempted!”⁵ There are none—not even those most dear to us—to whom we can unbosom ourselves, as we do to our heavenly Friend. Our wants, griefs, burdens of every kind—we are encouraged to roll them all upon him. Those

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

² Psalm ciii. 14.

³ Psalm xxxix. 9.

⁴ Isaiah lxiii. 9.

⁵ Hebrews ii. 18.

who cultivate the blessing of communion with their Lord, well know the full comfort of this relief in the hour of affliction. They know also what compassion is due to those, who are indeed "*afflicted very much*;" whose souls, as they "draw nigh unto death," and know no refuge, are ready to burst with their own sorrows—"the sorrows of the world,"—unmitigated—unrelieved—"working death."¹

There is a "need be"² for the afflictions of the Lord's people. They have little understood the power of Almighty working needful to subjugate their wills to the dispensations of God. The stones of the spiritual temple cannot be polished or fitted to their place without the strokes of the hammer. The gold cannot be purified without the furnace. Yet the alleviations of our trials divest them of their penal character, and lead us to regard them as among the choicest and most encouraging instances of our Father's combined wisdom, faithfulness, and love. Need we say, that they are infinitely disproportioned to our deserts; that they are not without hope; that they are not eternal; and that in the end we shall find greater comfort probably vouchsafed in the endurance of them, than we even ventured to anticipate from their removal! Need we say—how richly they ought to be prized, as conforming us to the image of our suffering Lord! how clearly we shall one day read in them our Father's commission, as messengers of love! and how assuredly "the end of the Lord" will be "that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy!"³ Indeed how many of his dear children may bear the surname of Ephraim—"For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction!"⁴

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

³ James v. 11.

² 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

⁴ Genesis xli. 52.

But great affliction is often as hard to bear as great prosperity. While sorely smarting under the rod, we have most important need of the quickening grace of God to keep us alive from stout-heartedness and dejection. Are we in danger of “despising the chastening of the Lord?”—“*Quicken me, O Lord*”—that I may be preserved in a humble, wakeful, listening posture—that I may not, by an unprepared spirit, lose the blessing of the sanctified cross.’ Are we ready to “faint, when we are rebuked of him?”¹ “*Quicken me, O Lord,*” that I sink not under the “blow of thy hand.” Thus will this Divine influence save us from bringing dishonour upon our God by the workings of our own spirit. We shall receive the chastisement of our Father’s discipline with humility without despondency, and with reverence without distrust; hearkening to the voice that speaks, while we tremble under the rod that strikes: yet so mingling fear with confidence, that we may at the same moment adore the hand which we feel, and rest in the mercy that is promised. And how consoling in the depths of our affliction is the recollection, that in either case of need we are privileged to plead the word of God as our sure warrant for prayer and expectation—“*Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word!*” And which of the exercised children of God has ever found “one jot or one tittle of the word to fail?” “Patience working experience; and experience hope; and hope making not ashamed,” in the sense of “the love of God shed abroad, upon the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”—all this is the abundant answer to the prayer for quickening grace—the encouragement and support of waiting, discouraged souls—“Thou, which hast shewed me great

¹ Hebrews xii. 5.

and sore troubles, *shalt quicken me again*, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.”¹

108. *Accept, I beseech thee, the free-will offerings of my mouth, O Lord : and teach me thy judgments.*

As the first fruits of his entire self-devotion of himself to the Lord ;² as the only service he could render in his affliction ; and as an acknowledgment of the supply of quickening grace received in answer to prayer³— behold this faithful servant of God presenting “ *the free-will offerings of his mouth* ” for acceptance. Such he knew to be an acceptable service. For the sacrifices of the Old Testament were not only typical of the One sacrifice for sin, but illustrative of the spiritual worship of the people of God ; and in this view frequent allusion is made to them in both parts of the sacred volume.⁴ To those who are interested in the atonement of Jesus, there needeth “ no more sacrifice for sin.” That which is now required of us, and in which as the Lord’s people we delight, is to “ take with us words, and turn to him, and say unto him—Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously ; so will we render the calves of our lips.”⁵

No offering but “ a “ *free-will offering* ” is accepted. Such were the offerings of service under the law :⁶ and such must they be under the gospel. “ God loveth a cheerful giver.”⁷ Yet neither can this offering

¹ Romans v. 3—5, with Psalm lxxi. 20, 21.

² Verse 106.

³ Compare Psalm li. 16, 17. Mal. iii. 3, with Phil. iv. 18. Heb. xiii. 15, 16.

⁴ Verse 107.

⁵ Hosca xiv. 2.

⁶ Numbers xxix. 39. Deut. xvi. 10.

⁷ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

be accepted, until the offerer himself has found acceptance with his God. "The Lord had respect" first to the person of "Abel"—then "to his offering."¹ But if our persons are covered with the robe of acceptance—if the "offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"² has "sanctified" us before God; however defiled our services may be, however mixed with infirmity, and in every way most unworthy; even a God of ineffable holiness "beholds no iniquity"³ in them. No offering is so pure as to obtain acceptance in any other way; no offering so sinful as to fail of acceptance in this way. Most abundant indeed and satisfactory is the provision made in heaven for the continual and everlasting acceptance of our polluted and distracted services. "Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."⁴ With such a High Priest and Intercessor, not only is unworthiness dismissed, but boldness and assurance of faith is encouraged.⁵

But, as we remarked, it was "*a free-will offering*" that was here presented—the overflowings of a heart filled with the love of God. No constraint was necessary. Prayer was delightful. He was not forced upon his knees. Let me unite with him. Let me seek fellowship with him in again presenting myself before my God. 'Lord! I ought to be thine, and none other's. I desire to tell the world, that I am captivated by thy love, and consecrated to thy service.

¹ Gen. iv. 4, 5.

² Heb. x. 10.

³ Numbers xxxiii. 21.

⁴ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

⁵ Heb. iv. 14—16; x. 21, 22.

Oh let me be enabled to “*rejoice; for that I offered willingly.*” Great grace is it, that he is willing to accept my service. For what have I to offer, but what is already “his own?”¹ But let me not forget to supplicate for further instruction—“*Teach me thy judgments,*” that I may be directed to present a purer offering; that by more distinct and accurate knowledge of thy ways, my love may be enlarged, and my obedience more entire, until I “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”²

109. *My soul is continually in my hand; yet do I not forget thy law.*—110. *The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.*

THIS subject might offer some profitable meditation for those, whose health must frequently remind them of approaching danger, or whose familiarity with scenes of war and bloodshed may give peculiar emphasis to the phrase (of not unfrequent use in the word of God³)—“*My soul is continually in my hand.*” From the open violence⁴ and the secret machinations⁵ of his bitter enemy, David, in the early part of his public life, was in continual apprehension. Hunted down “as a partridge in the mountains,”⁶ and often scarcely escaping the “*snare which the wicked laid for him,*”⁷ at one time he could not but acknowledge—“there is but a step between me and death;”⁸ at another time he was tempted in an hour of unbelief to say—“I shall now perish one day by the hand of

¹ 1 Chron. xxix. 9, 14, 17.

² Col. iv. 12.

³ Compare Judges xii. 3. 1 Sam. xix. 5; xxviii. 21. Job xiii. 14.

⁴ 1 Sam. xviii. 10, 11; xix. 9, 10.

⁵ 1 Sam. xviii. 17; xix. 11—17.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxvi. 20.

⁷ The men of Keilah, 1 Sam. xxiii. 11, 12. The Ziphites, 1 Sam. xxiii. 9; xxvi. 1.

⁸ 1 Sam. xx. 3.

Saul.”¹ Subsequently, also, when the hand of his own son appeared to be aimed at his throne and his life,² this language was aptly descriptive of his state—“*My soul is continually in my hand.*” Yet so undaunted was his resolution, that no peril could shake his adherence to the ways of God.³

What was the life of Jesus upon earth? Through the enmity of foes—various, opposite, yet combined⁴—his “*soul was continually in his hand.*” Yet how wonderful was his calmness and serenity of mind when surrounded by enemies, like “lions” in power, “dogs” in cruelty, wolves in malice!⁵ A measure of this spirit belongs to all his disciples, so far as they have the mind that was in their Master. For it is not natural courage, but “the spirit of power,” as the gift of God,⁶ which thus enables the believer, in the remembrance of the precepts, “to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”⁷

Let us again mark this confidence, illustrated in the recorded trials of the servants of God. What was the frame of the Apostle’s mind, when “the Holy Ghost witnessed to him in every city, that bonds and imprisonment awaited him?” “None of these things,” saith he, “move me. I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”⁸ He could look “tribulation, or persecution, or peril or sword,” in the face; and while he “*carried his soul continually in his hand,*”—in true Christian heroism, in the most exalted triumph of faith, he could say in the name of himself and his companions in tribulation—“Nay, in all these things

¹ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

² 2 Sam. xv. 13, 14; xvii. 1—3.

³ Verse 87.

⁴ Luke xxiii. 12.

⁵ Psalm xxii. 16, 20, 21, with Isaiah liii. 7.

⁶ 2 Tim. i. 7.

⁷ Eph. vi. 13.

⁸ Acts xx. 23, 24; xxi. 13.

we are more than conquerors." Nothing could make him flinch. Nothing could turn him back. Nothing could wring the love of the service of his God out of his heart. His principle was found invincible in the hour of trial—not, however, as a native energy of his heart, but "*through him that loved him.*"¹ Might not he with strict propriety have said—or did he not speak and live the spirit of this Christian confidence—" *Yet do I not forget thy law?*" Daniel's history, again, will furnish an instance of the utter impotency of the secret devices of the enemy to produce apostacy in the children of God. When "*the wicked,*" after many an ineffectual attempt to "find occasion or fault," were driven to seek for it in "the law of his God;"² and when in this unsuspected path they "*laid a snare for him,*" this noble confessor of the faith continued to "kneel upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime.*"³ The den of lions was far less fearful in his eyes, than one devious step from the strait and narrow path of God.⁴ Sin was dreaded as worse than a thousand deaths. He surely then could have said—" *Yet I erred not from thy precepts.*" And how striking must it have been to David, under circumstances of imminent peril, to have seen the "counsel of Ahithophel"—regarded as oracular, when employed in the cause of God—now, when directed against the church, "turned to foolishness!"⁵ But this instance was only "one of a thousand," when the ever-watchful Head and Guardian of his church, "lest any hurt it, keeps it night and day."⁶ Thus in

¹ Romans viii. 37.

² Daniel vi. 5.

³ Daniel vi. 6—10.

⁴ Compare Luke xii. 4, 5.

⁵ Compare 2 Samuel xvi. 23, with xv. 31; xvii. 14.

⁶ Isaiah xxvii. 3.

overruling the devices of the enemy for the establishment of his people's dependence upon himself, "he maketh the wrath of man to praise him,"¹ and "taketh away the wise in his own craftiness."²

But the day of difficulty is a "perilous time" in the church. "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried."³ Have we been able to sustain the shock in a steady adherence to the law and precepts of God?⁴ This is indeed the time, when genuine faith will be found of inestimable value. In such a time David, in an especial degree, experienced the blessing of having chosen the Lord for his God. Once and again—when clouds began to gather blackness, and surrounding circumstances to the eye of sense engendered despondency—faith held out the cheering prospect of All-sufficient support; and "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."⁵ And is not David's God "our God, the health of our countenance,"⁶ the guide of our path,⁷ the God of our salvation?⁸ Oh! let us not rest till his language is the expression of our own confidence; "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."⁹

It is this daily confidence of faith, that can alone prepare us for the hour of special need, that is approaching to us all. Those who have never realized the nearness of eternity, can have but a faint idea of the needful support in the hour, when "flesh and heart fail,"¹⁰ to have a sure unshaking foot upon "the Rock of Ages." "Watch therefore; for ye know not¹¹ how soon you may be ready to say—"My soul is in my hand," quivering on the eve of departure to the Judge. "Let your

¹ Psalm lxxvi. 10.

³ Dan. xii. 10.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

⁸ Ib. lxxviii. 20.

¹¹ Mark xiii. 26.

² Job v. 13, with 1 Cor. iii. 19.

⁴ Verses 51, 69. Rev. ii. 10.

⁶ Psalm xlii. 11.

⁹ Ib. lvi. 3.

⁷ Ib. xlvi. 14.

¹⁰ Ib. lxxiii. 35.

loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for the Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him *immediately*. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”¹

111. *Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*

‘PRECIOUS Bible! what a treasure!’ David had felt its value, inasmuch as the choice of it had been the secret of his perseverance in the midst of trial. All who have a part and portion in Christ have a portion in the word which testifies of him. This forms the believer’s claim and delight in “*the testimonies*.” He is indeed utterly unable to calculate their price. The Saviour—*his Saviour*—is revealed in them. And such exact suitableness does he find in them to his own case—such wise direction in the precepts—such wholesome discipline in the reproofs—such Divine comfort in the promises—that, as they pass before him, he cannot but say—“*They are the rejoicing of my heart*.” But their chief interest in his eyes is connected with the recollection, that they are his portion—his “*heritage*.” And this indeed may account for the affecting indifference, with which the world barter away these treasures, as Esau did his birthright,² for something as worthless as a mess of pottage—that they have no present interest in them. Justly, however, are they called the believer’s

¹ Luke xii. 35—37.

² Gen. xxv. 29—34. Heb. xii. 16.

“*heritage*.” They are his covenant property, stamped with the seal of “the everlasting covenant.” And not only does he look at the word of God as the exhibition and tender of the mercy of the Gospel, but he marks every promise sprinkled with the blood of Christ, as the seal of the blessings contained in it, and the pledge of their performance in the exercise of faith.

Need we then entreat you, believer, to value this your “*heritage*”—to exhibit to the world, that the promises are not an empty sound—that they impart a Divine reality of support and enjoyment—and that an interest in them habitually realized to the soul is a blessed, a heavenly portion? Should your heart, however, at any time be captivated by the transient prospect before your eyes, should you be led to imagine some substantial value in this world’s treasures—you will have forgotten the peculiar pre-eminence of your heritage—its enduring character—“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass”—withering and falling away; “but the word of the Lord”—and therefore your “*heritage in it*”—“endured for ever.”¹ And what are the gaudy follies—the glittering emptiness of this passing scene, in comparison of the prospects, or even of the present sources of enjoyment, which your “*heritage*” holds before your eyes? Will you forsake a soul-satisfying and eternal portion, to cast in your lot with “the men of this world, which have their portion in this life,”² and who, “having received their consolation,”³ will soon have “spent their all,” and must “begin to be in” infinite, eternal “want?”⁴ Such as these—having no interest in this heavenly *heritage*, can have no pleasure in surveying it. If, therefore, conscience imposes upon them the drudgery of casting

¹ 1 Peter i. 24, 25.

³ Luke vi. 24.

² Psalm xvii. 14.

⁴ Luke xv. 14.

their careless eye across the page, what wonder if they should find in it nothing to enliven their hopes, or to attract their hearts? What communion can worldly hearts hold with this heavenly treasure? What spiritual light, as the source of heavenly comfort, can penetrate this dark recess? As well might the inhabitant of the subterraneous cavern expect the cheerful light of the sun; as the man, whose eyes and heart are in the centre of the earth, enjoy the spiritual perception of an interest in "*the heritage*" of the people of God. If, however, the darkness and difficulties of the word are pleaded in excuse for ignorance; let it be confessed by those indolent triflers, how small a portion of that perseverance and devotedness of heart, which has been employed in gathering together the perishing stores of this world, has been given to search into this hidden mine of unsearchable riches!

Oh, my soul! If I can lay claim to this blessed "*heritage*" I would not envy the miser his gold—I would rather adore that grace, which has "made me to differ" from him; and made me far happier and far richer in "*my heritage*," than he can ever be in his. But let me be seeking daily to enrich myself from this imperishable store; so that, poor as I am in myself, and seeming to "have nothing," I may find myself in reality to be "possessing all things."¹ Let the recollection of the rich heritage of light, comfort, peace and strength, furnished in the word, be my abundant joy; and bind my heart to a closer adherence to its obligations, and to a more habitual apprehension of its privileges.

¹ 2 Corinthians vi. 10. *

112. *I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes
always, even unto the end.*

WE cannot wonder at this resolution. When the Psalmist had “*taken the testimonies of God as an heritage for ever,*” and found them to be “*the rejoicing of his heart,*” it seems natural, that he should “*incline his heart*” to perseverance in the enjoyment of his portion. And yet to “*incline the heart to the Lord’s statutes*” is as much the work of God as to create a world; and as soon could “*the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots,*” as we could “*do good, who are accustomed to do evil.*”¹ And David was very far from meaning, that he had by any act of his own power, been able to turn the channel of his affections out of their natural course. Often had he made it the subject of prayer;² and as prayer sets every principle of the soul in action, thus in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, working in him, and setting him to work, he “*inclined his heart to the statutes of God.*” Weak indeed are our purposes, and fading our resolutions, unsupported by Divine grace: yet strength even to “*mount upon eagles’ wings, to run without weariness, and to walk without fainting*”³—or conflict with difficulties without desponding, will always be received in the exercise of “*waiting upon the Lord.*” Conscious that “*without Christ we can do nothing*”⁴—“*but through Christ all things,*”⁵ let the strength already imparted be exercised, in dependence upon the continued supply from above; and thus with willingness, freedom, and delight, turning to the Lord, closing with him, and following him, we shall “*incline our hearts*” with the full purpose

¹ Jer. xiii. 23.

² Verses 36, 37.

³ Isaiah xi. 31.

⁴ John xv. 5.

⁵ Phil. iv. 13.

“ *to perform his statutes alway, even unto the end.*” This is God’s way of putting quickening life and delightful motion into a soul that was “ dead in trespasses and sins;” when by an inexpressible sweetness he allures it, and at the same moment by an invincible power draws it to himself.

Every step indeed to the end will continue to be a conflict with indwelling sin, in the form of remaining enmity, sloth, or unbelief. But how encouraging it is to trace every tender prayer, every contrite groan, every working of spiritual desire, to the assisting, upholding influence of the free spirit of God.”¹ The continual drawing of the spirit will give the spring to perseverance in the ways of God. The same hand that gave the new bias to direct the soul in a heaven-ward motion, will be put forth from time to time to quicken that motion “ *to incline the heart even unto the end.*” And this view will give a bright ray of comfort and support to that hardest of all words in Christian experience—Persevere—“ *always—even unto the end.*” ‘ I can hardly hold on ’—the believer might say—‘ from one step to another. How can I then dare to hope, that I shall hold on a constant course—a daily conflict—“ *unto the end?*” ’ But was it not Almighty power, that supported the first step in your course? And is not the same Divine help pledged to every successive step of difficulty? Doubt not then that “ He is faithful that hath promised: ”² dare to be confident of this very thing, that he which hath “ begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”³ And in this confidence go on to “ work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”⁴

¹ See Romans viii. 26.

² Phil. i. 6.

³ Hebrews x. 23.

⁴ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

PART XV.

113. *I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.*

“VAIN *thoughts*” are the natural produce of the unrenewed heart, and of the yet unrenewed part of the believer’s heart. Who that is sensible of “the plague of his own heart,” and of the spirituality of the Christian walk with God, does not constantly complain of their baneful influence! How does the child of God long, that his “every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!”¹ But he “sees another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind;” so that, when he “would do good, evil is present with him.”² When he would “attend upon the Lord without distraction;”³ many times even in a single exercise does he seem to forget his sacred employment. Sin seems to enter into every pore of his soul; and a cloud of *vain thoughts* darkens every avenue to communion with God. He would gladly say—“My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed,”⁴—but he finds his affections wandering, as “the eyes of the fool, in the ends of the earth,”⁵ as if there was no object of Divine attraction to his soul. We do not hear the worldling, or indeed the servant of God in his worldly employments, complaining of this burden. He can bring to deep, important, and anxious concerns of this world all that intensity and fixedness of attention, which the emergency

¹ 2 Cor. x. 5. ² Rom. vii. 21, 23. ³ 1 Cor. vii. 35.

⁴ Psalm lvii. 7.

⁵ Prov. xvii. 24.

may demand. Indeed the wily adversary would rather assist than hinder this concentration of mind, as diverting the soul from the immensely momentous and interesting subjects of eternity. But never do the "sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord," except "Satan comes also among them."¹

"*Vain thoughts*" are some of his ceaseless hindrances to our spiritual communion with God. We are probably often not sufficiently aware of the subtilty, and therefore the peculiar danger of this temptation. We should instinctively start from an enticement to some open transgression. The incursion of defiling or blasphemous thoughts would be such a burden to us, that we should "have no rest in our spirit," while they remain undisturbed within us. But perhaps neither of these temptations are so formidable as the crowd of thoughts of every kind, incessantly running to and fro in the mind; the indulgence of which, though not actually sinful in itself, yet as effectually restrains the soul from intercourse with God, as the most hateful injections. These are the "foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the tender grapes."² Sometimes the "*thoughts*" may be even spiritual in their nature, and yet "*vain*" in their tendency; as being unsuitable to the frame at the present moment, and calculated, and indeed intended by the great enemy, to divert the mind from some positive duty. Who has not felt a serious thought upon an unseasonable subject, and at an unseasonable time, to be in its effects and consequences a "*vain thought*"—the secret working of the false "angel of light,"³ attempting to divide the attention between two things, so that neither of them may be wholly done, done to any purpose, done at all?⁴ * If at any time

¹ Job i. 6.

² Cant. ii. 15.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

⁴ Greenham (one of the most valuable of the Puritan writers upon experimental subjects) used to bring his distractions of mind to this

“iniquity has been regarded in the heart;” if the world in any of its thousand forms has regained a temporary ascendancy; or if the imaginations of a lusting heart are not constantly “held in” as “with bit and bridle;” these “*vain thoughts*,” ever ready to force their entrance, will at such seasons, “get an advantage of us.” Restless in their workings, they keep no sabbaths; and can only be successfully met by a watchful and unceasing warfare.

It may indeed be sometimes difficult, in the midst of continued trial from this source, to maintain a clear sense of adoption, or to “assure our hearts before God.” But the inquiry for our own hearts, as a distinctive mark of Christian sincerity, is—Do we cordially “*hate*” them, as exceeding sinful in the sight of God,¹ hurtful to our own souls,² and contrary to our new nature?³ If we cannot altogether prevent their entrance, or eject them from their settlement, are we careful not to invite them, not to entertain them, not to suffer them to “*lodge within*”⁴ us? This hatred and revolting from their

test—If they brought any past sin to mind for his humiliation, or any comfort to excite his thankfulness, or any instruction suitable to the present moment—he took them to be of God. But if they *drew off his mind from present duty* to rove after other objects, he suspected their source, and girded himself to prayer for increasing steadiness of application, to the matter in hand. See his works, folio, p. 23. Being asked to account for distractions in holy meditations, he said—It was either want of preparation and sanctifying the heart by prayer before we set upon so holy an exercise, and therefore a rebuke from the Lord for our ‘presumption in being bold to work upon holy matters in our own strength’—or else a dependence upon a general purpose of thinking good, or restraining evil, without fastening our minds upon some particular object, but rather “ranging up and down,” leaving some part of our mind and meditation void for other matters, without wholly and seriously setting on a thing propounded. When any complained to him of blasphemous thoughts, he would say—‘Do not fear them, but abhor them.’

¹ Prov. xxiv. 9.

² Canticles ii. 15, and Scott, *in loco*.

³ Romans vii. 22.

⁴ Compare Jer. iv. 14.

influence is a satisfactory proof, that they are not so much the natural suggestion of the heart, as the injections of the enemy of our peace. They are at least so directly opposed to our better will and dominant bias, that we may say—"If I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin, that dwelleth in me."¹ As far then as they come from within, our affliction and conflict with them prove that they dwell there—not as welcome guests, or as the family of the house—but as "thieves and robbers." The indulgence of them *constitutes our sin*. Their indwelling may be considered *only as our temptation*. They supply indeed continual matter for watchfulness, humiliation, and resistance; yet so far as they are abhorred and resisted, they may be considered rather as infirmities than as iniquities, leaving no stain of actual guilt upon the conscience. An increasing sense of the sinfulness of sin, and of the extent of duty, will discover to us their deeper aggravations and more persevering opposition. Still however, even while we groan under their defiling, distracting influence in our best services, and in our most favoured moments of approach to God; we may commit ourselves with assured confidence to him, who "spareth us, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him,"² and who will not fail to gather up the broken parts of our prayers with merciful acceptance.

But the subjugation of this evil—even though we be secured from condemnation on account of it—is a matter of the deepest concern. Forget not—oh, may the impression be indelible!—that it was for these *vain thoughts* that Christ was nailed to the cross. Here lies the ground of self-loathing—the quickening principle of conflict and exertion. Let the heart—the

¹ Romans vii. 20.

² Malachi iii. 17.

seat of this evil disease—be daily washed in the cleansing blood of Calvary: for until the corrupt fountain be cleansed, it must ever “send forth bitter waters.”¹ Let it be diligently “kept,”² and carefully filled, so that it may be a “good treasure bringing forth good things.”³ Let there be the continued exercise of that “watchfulness” “which is unto prayer,”⁴ combined with an unflinching adherence to the path of plain and obvious duty. Let the temptation to desist awhile from services so polluted, that they appear rather to mock God than to worship him, be met on the onset with the most determined opposition. To receive this suggestion would indeed give our active enemy the most important advantage. He would not fail to pour in successive incursions of *vain thoughts* into our perplexed and yielding minds, to turn us back from time to time in our attempts to approach to God. If therefore we cannot proceed as we could wish, let us proceed as we can. If a connected train of thought or expression fails us, let us only change—not surrender—our posture of resistance; substituting sighs, desires, tears and groaning for words, and casting ourselves upon our God in the simple confidence of faith—“Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee. Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”⁵ It is far better to wander in duty than from it. For if *any duty* be neglected on account of the defilement that is mingled with it, for the same reason the neglect of *every other duty* must follow: and, as the final consequence, the worship of God would be abolished from the earth.

¹ Compare 2 Kings ii. 19—22. Jer. iv. 14.

² Proverbs iv. 23.

³ Matthew xii. 35.

⁴ Ib. xxvi. 41.

⁵ Psalm xxxviii. 9; lvi. 8.

Much of our successful warfare will, however, depend upon an accurate and well-digested acquaintance with our own hearts. Much also belongs to a discovery of the bias of the mind in our unoccupied moments, and of the peculiar seasons and circumstances that give most power to temptation. This once known, let a double watch be set against those doors, by which the enemy has been accustomed to find his most convenient and unobstructed entrance.

But least of all should we forget the effectual means suggested by David's experience—the excitement of our hearts to the “*love of the law of God.*” ‘He that loves a holy law,’ remarks an excellent old writer—‘cannot but hate a vain thought.’¹ If the law be the transcript of the image of God; when the thoughts are affectionately drawn out towards him, it must have a natural tendency to fix the image of the beloved friend upon the mind, and by a sweet constraining influence to fasten down the thoughts to Divine contemplation. Are we then ever winged with an elevating love to the Saviour? And shall not we find our hearts starting out from their worldly employments with frequent glances and flights upwards towards the objects of our desire? And will not this habitual intercourse and communion of love gradually mould the soul into a fixed frame of delight—exciting our hatred, and strengthening our resistance of every earthly affection? Thus, as the powers of the renewed man are called forth in a “*love*” for the holy “*law of God,*” “*spiritual wickedness*” will be abhorred, conflicted with, and overcome.

Yet these defilements will remain, to die with the last breathings of the old man; which though crucified indeed, and expiring, will struggle with fearful

¹ Steele's Antidote against Distractions.

strength and unabated enmity to the end. And let them remain, as humbling mementos of our unclean nature—"shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin;"¹ and as enlivening our anticipations of that blessed place where "shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth;"² where "*vain thoughts*," and whatever beside might "separate between us and our God," will be unknown for ever. Meanwhile let them endear to us the free justification of the Gospel; let them lead us daily and hourly to repair to "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;"³ and enhance in our view that heavenly intercession, which provides for the perfect cleansing and acceptance of services even such as ours.

Blessed contemplation! Jesus prays not for us as we do for ourselves. His intercession is without distraction—without interruption. If we are then so dead that we cannot, and so guilty that we dare not, pray, and so wandering under the influence of "*vain thoughts*," that our prayers appear to be scattered to the winds, rather than to ascend to the God of heaven—if on these accounts combined, we "are so troubled that we cannot speak;"⁴ yet always is there one to speak for us, of whom "a voice from heaven" testified for our encouragement, saying—"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."⁵ With such hopes, motives, and encouragements, let us "continue instant in prayer,"⁶ *until we pray, and that we may pray*. Let us supplicate our Lord with restless importunity, that the omnipotent power of his love would take hold of these hearts, which every moment sin and Satan seem ready to seize. At the same time, while we are conscious of our hatred of

¹ Psalm li. 5.

² Zech. xiii. 1.

⁵ Matthew iii. 17.

² Rev. xxi. 27.

⁴ Psalm lxxvii. 4.

⁶ Romans xii. 12.

every interruption to his service, and of the simplicity of our affection to his holy law, let us feel our right to maintain that confidence before him, that will issue in perfect peace and established consolation.

114. *Thou art my hiding place, and my shield; I hope in thy word.*

THINK of the unremitting vigilance of the enemy pursuing this man of God into his secret retirement, and defiling his every attempt to serve or enjoy his God. Can we wonder then to see him fleeing to his "*hiding-place*," where he could "keep himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not?"¹ But where, and what is the believer's hiding-place? "A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest."² A man! A wondrous man indeed!—whose "name shall be called the Mighty God;"³ for "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."⁴ Yes—Jesus exposed himself to the fury of "the wind and tempest," that he might provide "a hiding-place and a covert" for us. The broken law pursued with its relentless curse—"This sinner ought to die"—But "*thou art my hiding-place and my shield*," who hast "redeemed me from the curse of the law, being made a curse for me."⁵ "The fiery darts" pour in on every side; but the recollection of past security in "*my hiding-place*," and beneath "*my shield*," makes me ready with my song of acknowledgment—"Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible one is as a storm against the

¹ 1 John v. 18.

² Isaiah xxxii. 2.

³ Isaiah ix. 6.

⁴ Colossians ii. 9.

⁵ Gal. iii. 10, 13.

wall.¹ Our *hiding-place* covers us from the power of the world. "In me,"—saith our Saviour—"ye shall have peace. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."² Helpless to resist the great enemy, our Lord brings us to his wounded side, and hides us there. We "overcome him by the blood of the Lamb."³ To all accusations from every quarter, our challenge is ready, "who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?"⁴ From the fear of death, our hiding-place still covers us. "Jesus through death hath destroyed him that had the power of death."⁵ Against the sting of this last enemy, a song of thanksgiving is put into our mouth—"O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."⁶ Thus is "the smoking flax," which the malice of Satan strives to extinguish, not "quenched;" nor is "the bruised reed," which seems beyond the hope of restoration, "broken." Jesus is our "*hiding-place*." Hidden springs of life are perpetually flowing from him.

The world must often be surprised at the constancy of the believer amidst all their varied efforts to shake his steadfastness. They know not "the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear him."⁷ A hiding-place implies secrecy. The believer's life is a hidden life⁸—hidden beyond the comprehension of the world, and the power of the enemy. How safe, then, is he in the midst of surrounding ruin! and how invincible the strength by which he is guarded! Never could he have had a just conception of the all-sufficiency of his God, until he finds it above him, around him, underneath

¹ Isaiah xxv. 4.

³ Rev. xii. 11.

⁵ Hebrews ii. 14, 15.

⁷ Psalm xxv. 14.

² John xvi. 33.

⁴ Romans viii. 33, 34.

⁶ I Cor. xv. 55, 57.

⁸ Col. iii. 3.

him, in all the fulness of everlasting love—*his hiding-place and his shield*. Thus in the heart of the enemy's country "he dwelleth on high, and his place of defence is the munitions of rocks." ¹

But are we acquainted with this *hiding-place*? How have we discovered it? Are we found in it, and careful to abide in it? "Them that are without, God judgeth." Within the walls of *our hiding-place* and covered by *our shield*, "that wicked one toucheth us not." ² But never shall we venture outside the walls unprotected, without some painful remembrance of our unwatchfulness from the assault of our own wakeful foe. There is but one *hiding-place* from the wind and tempest. All besides, that seems to promise security, is a "refuge of lies which the hail shall sweep away; and a *hiding-place* which the waters shall overflow." ³ Surely that blessed *word*," that has discovered the *hiding-place*, is a firm warrant for the Christian's "*hope*." And therefore every sinner, who is hid in the covert of love, will be ready to declare—"I hope in thy word."

115. *Depart from me, ye evil doers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.*

SAFE and quiet in his "*hiding-place*, and behind *his shield*," David deprecates all attempts to disturb his peace. "*Depart from me, ye evil doers*." He had found them to be opposed to his best interests; and he dreaded their influence in shaking his determination of obedience to his God. Indeed such society must ever be a prevailing hindrance alike to the enjoyment and to the service of God. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" And can

¹ Isaiah xxxiii. 16. ² 1 John v. 18. ³ Isaiah xxviii. 16, 17.

we be "agreed" with God, so as to walk in fellowship with him, except we be at variance with the principles, the standard, and conduct of a world that is "enmity against him?"¹ Not more needful was the exhortation to the first Christians than to ourselves—"Save yourselves from this untoward generation."² True fellowship with God implies therefore a resolute course of separation from an ungodly world. Secure in the "hiding-place," and covered with the "shield" of his covenant God, the believer fears not their rebuke. He meets their malice, and resists their enticements, with the undaunted front of "a good soldier of Jesus Christ."³

Not indeed that we would stamp our profession with morose or ascetic seclusion. We are expressly enjoined to courtesy and kindness;⁴ to that wise and considerate walk towards them that are without,⁵ which "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour,"⁶ and indeed in some instances has been more powerful even than the word itself,⁷ to "win souls to Christ." But when they would tempt us to a devious or backsliding step, from the ways of God—when our connexion with them entices us to a single act of conformity to their standard, dishonourable to God, and inconsistent with our engagements to his service—then it becomes us to take a bold and unflinching stand—"Depart from me, ye evil doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God."

The spirit of this resolution gives no countenance to the self-delusive notion of maintaining an intimate connexion with professed "evil doers" for the kind purpose of recommending our religion to their acceptance—a scheme which requires a rare degree of caution and

¹ Compare Matthew vi. 24. James iv. 4.

² Acts ii. 40.

³ 2 Timothy ii. 3.

⁴ 1 Peter iii. 8.

⁵ Col. iv. 5.

⁶ Titus ii. 10.

⁷ Compare 1 Peter iii. 1.

simplicity to attempt without entangling the conscience ; and which, for the most part at least, it is to be feared, is intended as a specious covering for the indulgence of a worldly spirit. If the world are to be met, and their society invited, for the accomplishment of this benevolent intention, let it be upon the principle of the Lord's command to his prophet—“ *Let them return unto thee ; but return not thou to them.*”¹ The amiable desire to “ please our neighbour ” is limited to the single purpose and end, that it should be “ *for his good to edification.*”² And whenever this end and restriction has been overlooked, it is sufficiently evident that self-gratification has been the moving principle ; and that the distinctive mark of the Christian character—bearing the cross, and confessing the name of our Divine Master—has been obscured.

Sometimes, however, in the struggle of conscience, an apprehension of danger is not altogether forgotten, and the question is asked with some trembling of spirit—“ *How far may I conform to the world, without endangering the loss of my religion ?* ” But, not to speak of the insincerity and self-deception of such a question, it would be better answered by substituting another in its place—“ *How far may I be separate from the world, and yet be destitute of the vital principle ?* ” Scrutinize, in every advancing step toward the world, the workings of your own heart. Suspect its reasonings. Be ready to listen to the first awakened conviction of conscience. Though it be only a whisper, or a hint, it may be generally regarded as the indication of the Divine will. And as it concerns this particular point of difficulty, let it be remembered that the experiment of conformity to the world, often as it has been tried, has never been

¹ Jer. xv. 19.

² Compare Romans xv. 2.

found to answer the desired end. Whatever may be the effect of this compromise in *recommending ourselves*—no progress has been made in *recommending our Master* to the world; since his name—whether from unwatchfulness or cowardice on our part, or from the overpowering flow of the world on the other side, has probably in such society scarcely passed over our lips with any refreshment or power of attraction. Indeed so far from commending our religion by this accommodation, we have succeeded in ingratiating ourselves in their favour, only so far as we have been content to restrain any prominent introduction of it to their notice; while at the same time, our yielding conformity to their taste, and habits, and conversation, has virtually sanctioned their erroneous and defective standard of conduct, and tended to deceive them with the self-complacent conviction, that it approaches as near to the Scriptural elevation, as is absolutely required. The final result, therefore, of this attempt to conciliate the gospel to those who “have no heart to it,” is—that our own consciences have been ensnared, while they retain all their principles unaltered.

It must surely be obvious, that such a course is plainly opposed to the revealed declarations of Scripture, and bears the decisive character of unfaithfulness to our Great Master. We might also ask, whether our love to the Lord can be in fervent exercise, while we “love them that hate him?”¹—whether our hatred of sin can be active and powerful, while we can find pleasure in the society of those, whose life, “without God in the world,”² is none other than an habitual wilful course of rebellion against him?³—whether we

¹ 2 Chron. xix. 2.

² Eph. ii. 12.

³ Who are the wicked, but those that forget God? Psalm ix. 17; x. 4.

can have any deep and experimental sense of our own weakness, when thus venturing into temptation?—whether by unnecessary contact with the world, we can expect to “go upon hot coals,” and our “feet not be burned?”¹—or, in fact, whether we are not forgetting the dictates of common prudence in forsaking the path of safety for a slippery path, more accordant to our own inclinations?

But, supposing the path of duty not to be determined with infallible certainty by the light of Scripture, let this line of conduct be subjected to the impartial scrutiny of our own hearts, and of the effects, whether neutral or positively detrimental, which have resulted from it to ourselves, or to the church. Have we not felt this fellowship with “*evil-doers*” to be an hindrance in “*keeping the commandments of our God?*” If it has not always ended in open conformity to their maxims, or, if contrary to our apprehensions, it is not considered to give a sanction to their principles, yet have we realized no deadening unfavourable influence? Has the spirit of prayer sustained no injury in this atmosphere? Have we never been conscious of the danger of imbibing their taste, the spirit of their conversation and general conduct; which, without fixing any blot upon our external profession, must insensibly estrange the best affections of the heart from God? And have we never considered the injury of this worldly association to the gospel in weakening by an apparent want of decision “on the Lord’s side,”² the sacred cause which we are pledged to support; and obscuring the Scriptural character of the people of God as a distinct and separate

¹ Proverbs vi. 28.

² Compare Exodus xxxii. 26. Judges v. 23. Matthew xii. 30.

people? ¹ As far as providence marks our path, we go safely in the spirit of humility, watchfulness, and prayer. As far as a connexion with "*evil doers*" is found to be a cross, it is not likely to prove a snare; but if we can manifest an union of spirit with them, to whom David says, with holy determination—"depart from me"—and to whom David's Lord will one day say—"depart" ²—is there not a want of fellowship between our spirit and his, and an essential unfitness for communion with the society of heaven? The children of this world can have no more real communion with the children of light, than darkness has with light. ³ As great is the difference between the Christian and the world, as between heaven and hell—as between the sounds—"Come, ye blessed," and—"Depart, ye cursed." ⁴ The difference, which at that solemn day will be made for eternity, must therefore be visibly made now. They must depart from us, or we from God. We cannot walk with them both. 'Defilement'—as Mr. Cecil remarks—'is inseparable from the world.' ⁵ We cannot hold communion with God, in the indulgence of worldly society; and therefore, separation from the world, or separation from God, is the alternative. Which way—which company—is most congenial to our taste? May we have grace to listen to our Father's voice of love—"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty!" ⁶

¹ Compare Numbers xxiii. 9. John xvii. 16.

² Matthew xxv. 41.

³ 2 Corinthians vi. 14.

⁴ Matthew xxv. 34, 41.

⁵ Cecil's Remains.

⁶ 2 Corinthians vi. 17, 18.

116. *Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live :
and let me not be ashamed of my hope.*

LEST the Psalmist should seem to have been self-confident in his rejection of the society of the ungodly, and determination to adhere to his God; we find him here, as on former occasions,¹ mindful of his own weakness, and committing himself to the upholding grace of God. Indeed the highest Archangel before the throne stands only as he is upheld by the Lord, and may unite with the weakest child in the Lord's family in the acknowledgment—"By the grace of God I am what I am."² Much more, therefore, must I, pressed as I am on every side with daily conflict and temptation, and conscious of my own weakness and liability to fall, approach the throne of grace as a suppliant for "grace to help in time of need."³ My plea is the word of promise—"according to thy word"—"as thy days, so shall thy strength be."⁴ "Fear thou not"—is the language of my upholding God—"For I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."⁵ Blessed be the goodness that made the promise, and that guides the hand of my faith, as it were, to fasten upon it!

And why do I need the promise? why do I plead it; but "*that I may live*"—that I may know that

¹ Verses 8, 31. The same frame is marked—Psalm xxii. 4, 5.

² 1 Cor. xv. 10. Compare 2 Peter ii. 4.

³ Man's wisdom is to seek

His strength in God alone;

And e'en an angel would be weak

Who trusted in his own.—*Couper*.

⁴ Heb. iv. 16.

⁵ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

⁶ Isaiah xli. 10.

life which is found and enjoyed “in the favour” of God? ¹ Nothing seems worth a serious thought beside; nothing else deserves the name of life, but the service and enjoyment of God. And therefore quickening grace—new life—“life more abundantly” ²—let it be the burden of every prayer—the cry of every moment. Thus upheld by the Lord’s grace, and living in the comfort of his presence, I hope to feel the increasing support of my Christian hope. Though I have just before expressed a confident *hope in God’s word*,—though I have been enabled to “make my boast in the Lord,” as “*my hiding place and my shield*,” ³ yet a sense of continual helplessness leads me earnestly to pray—“*Let me not be ashamed of my hope.*”

Yes—Jesus is the sinner’s hope—“the hope set before” his people, to which they “flee for the refuge” of their souls. And well may our “hope” in him be called “an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast.” ⁴ How does the distressed Church plead with *The hope of Israel*—in her complaint—and put her God in remembrance of this his own name, ⁵ that she might *not be ashamed of her hope!* And how does she eventually learn by this pleading, as every member of her body learns—to say in the confidence of faith—“*I know whom I have believed.*” ⁶ And is there not a solid ground for this confidence? Is not the “stone that is laid in Zion for a foundation,” a “tried stone?” Has it not been tried in ten thousand instances—tried by thousands and millions of sinners—nay, more, tried by God himself, and found to be “a sure foundation?” ⁷ Yet still, that I may “hold fast the beginning of my confidence,” and “the rejoicing of my hope, firm unto the

¹ Psalm xxx. 5.

² John x. 10.

³ Verse 114.

⁴ Heb. vi. 18, 19.

⁵ Jer. xiv. 8.

⁶ 2 Tim. i. 12.

⁷ Isa. xxviii. 16.

end,"¹ I must persevere in prayer—"Uphold me according unto thy word."

David when left to feel his own weakness, was "ashamed of his hope"—"I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes."² At another time, when upheld by the Lord in a season of accumulated trial, it is recorded of him, "that he encouraged himself in the Lord his God."³ Thus I see "whercin my great strength lieth," and how impotent I am when left to myself. What a mercy, that my salvation will never for a single moment be in my own keeping! what need have I to pray to be saved from myself! How delightful is the exercise of faith in going to the Strong for strength! The issue of my spiritual conflicts is certain. He who is the author will ever be the upholder of the "hidden life" in his people. It is a part of his own life, and therefore can never perish. The tempter himself will flee, when he marks the poor, feeble, fainting soul, "*upheld according to the word of his God,*" and placed in safety beyond the reach of his malice.⁴ Not however that, as I once supposed, my weakness will ever be made strong; but that I shall daily grow more sensible of it, shall stay myself more simply upon infinite everlasting strength; and "most gladly shall I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."⁵

¹ Heb. iii. 6, 14.

² Psalm xxxi. 22.

³ 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

⁴ See 1 Peter i. 5.

⁵ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

117. *Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*

SUCH is my sense of need and peril, that my only refuge lies in "continuing instant in prayer."¹ I must therefore send up one cry after another into my Father's ear for the support of his upholding grace. For not only the consciousness of my weakness, but the danger of the slippery path before me, reminds me, that the safety of every moment depends upon the upholding power of my faithful God. The ways of temptation are so many and imperceptible—the influence of it so appalling—the entrance into it so deceitful, so specious, so insensible—my own weakness and unwatchfulness so unspeakable—that I can do nothing but go on my way, praying at every step—"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Often indeed can I remember—when "my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped:"² that, when I have said, "my foot slippeth," I have been enabled to record—"Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."³

How beautiful is the description of this experience in the picture given of the Church of old—"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, *leaning upon her Beloved?*"⁴ This state of dependence appears to have been familiar to the Psalmist, and aptly delineates his affectionate, though conflicting, confidence in his God. "My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."⁵ The recollection of the care of his God, from the earliest moments of his life, supplied encouragement for his present faith, and matter for unceasing praise—"By thee have I been holden up from the womb; thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall

¹ Rom. xii. 12.

² Psalm lxxiii. 2.

³ Psalm xciv. 18.

⁴ Cant. viii. 5.

⁵ Psalm lxxiii. 8.

be continually of thee.”¹ We cannot wonder, then, that this confidence should sustain his soul in the contemplation of the remaining steps of his pilgrimage, and his prospects for eternity—“Nevertheless”—saith he—“I am continually with thee: *thou hast holden me* by my right hand. *Thou shalt guide me* with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.”² And indeed the more lively my spiritual apprehensions are, the more conscious I shall be, that the Lord is, by the operations of his grace as well as of his providence, “compassing my path and my lying down,”³ “lest any hurt me, keeping me night and day.”⁴

If it be inquired—how the Lord “*holds up*” his people in this slippery path, the answer is—“Of the fulness of Jesus they all receive, and grace for grace;”⁵ so that “the life which they now live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God.”⁶ And therefore if I am upheld, it is by the indwelling of the Spirit, who supplies from his infinite fountain of life all the strength and support I need throughout my dangerous way. By his Divine influence the dispensations of providence also become the appointed means of drawing and keeping me near to my God. If therefore prosperity is endangering my soul, and strengthening my worldly bonds, may I not trust to the ever-watchful kindness of the Lord, to keep me low, and not to suffer me to be at ease in my forgetfulness? If the pleasures of sense, if the esteem of the world, or the good report of the church, are bringing a bewitching snare upon my soul, my God will lead me into the pathway of the cross—in the ‘valley of humiliation.’

But how clearly is the secret of an unsteady walk

¹ Psalm lxxi. 6.

² Psalm cxxxix. 3.

³ John i. 16.

⁴ Psalm lxxiii. 23, 24.

⁵ Isaiah xxvii. 3.

⁶ Gal. ii. 20.

traced to a neglect of leaning upon an Almighty arm ! And how fearfully is the danger of self-confidence unveiled ! If I am standing by my own strength, very soon shall I be made to feel, that I cannot stand at all. No "mountain" seemed to "stand stronger" than Solomon's ; yet when he became the very "fool" that he describes—"trusting in his own heart"—how quickly was it moved !¹

Peter thought in the foolishness of his heart, that he could have walked upon the water unsupported by the arm of his Lord ; but a moment's sense of weakness and danger brought him to his right mind : "and, *beginning to sink, he cried, saying—Lord, save me.*"² Well would it have been for him, if his deliverance at that moment of peril had effectually rebuked his presumption. We should not then have heard from the same lips that language of most unwarranted self-confidence :—"Although all shall be offended, yet will not I :—If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise."³ Poor deluded disciple ! thou art on the brink of a grievous fall ! Yet was he "*held up*" from utterly sinking. "*I have prayed for thee*" — said the gracious Saviour— "*that thy faith fail not.*"⁴ And thus "*held up*" by the same faithful intercession of my powerful friend (whose prayers are not weak as mine—"nor will he fail or be discouraged"⁵ by my continual backslidings,) "I" too—though in the atmosphere of danger, in the slippery path of temptation, "*shall be safe*"—safe from an ensnaring world—safe from a treacherous heart—safe in life—safe in death—safe in eternity. Thus does an interest in the covenant encourage—not presumption—but faith, in all its exercises of humility, watchfulness,

¹ Compare Psalm xxx. 6, 7. 1 Kings xi. 1—10. Prov. xxviii. 26.

² Matthew xiv. 28—30.

³ Mark xiv. 29, 31.

⁴ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

⁵ Isaiah xlii 4.

diligence, and prayer; and in this appointed way does the Lord securely "keep the feet of his saints."

Let me not then forget, either my continual liability to fall if left to myself, or the faithful engagements of my covenant God, to "keep me from falling." While I recollect for my comfort, that I "stand by faith," still is the exhortation most needful—"Be not high-minded, but fear."¹ "By faith I stand," as it concerns God; by fear as regards myself. As light is composed of neither brilliant nor sombre rays, but of the combination of both in simultaneous action; so is every Christian grace combined with its^{*} opposite, "that it may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Hope, therefore, combined with fear, issues in that genuine, evangelical confidence, in which alone I can walk safely and closely with God. Let, then, the self-confident learn to distrust themselves, and the fearful be encouraged to trust their Saviour; and in each let the recollection of grace and help vouchsafed "in time of need" lead to the steadfast resolution—"I will have respect unto thy statutes continually."—However self-denying they may be in their requirements: however opposed in their tendency to "the desires of the flesh and of the mind," I take God as the surety of my performance of them; and I desire to love as the rule of my daily conduct, and as forming the very element of heavenly happiness to my soul.

¹ Romans xi. 20.

118. *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.*—119. *Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love thy testimonies.*

THE cheerful, grateful determination to “*keep the statutes of God continually*” marks the Lord’s people from the “*wicked of the earth,*” who wilfully “*err from them.*” And indeed this difference in character is indicative of that difference of state, by which the purpose and mind of God has separated them from each other. His own people the Lord has exalted to be “*heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*”¹ Even now “*he hath made them to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;*” and they will shortly “*be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God;*”² while the ungodly “*are trodden down as the mire of the streets,*”³ and “*put away like dross*” from the precious gold. “*Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.*”⁴

Even in chastening, the Lord marks this difference. His own children he upholds with a Father’s hand. The wicked he “*treads down*” with his wrathful frown. Thus it was from the beginning; in his conduct to the two first children of men;⁵ and in his selection of Enoch,⁶ Noah,⁷ and Abraham⁸ from the world of the ungodly, “*as vessels of honour meet for the Master’s use.*”⁹ In after ages, he made the land of

¹ Romans viii. 17.

² Eph. ii. 6. Isaiah lxii. 3.

³ Micah vii. 10. Mal. iv. 3.

⁴ Jer. vi. 30.

⁵ Gen. iv. 4, 5. Heb. xi. 4.

⁶ Gen. v. 22—24. Heb. xi. 5.

⁷ Gen. vii. 1.

⁸ Gen. xii. 1—3.

⁹ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

Egypt “know, that he put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.”¹ They were his own people, that should dwell alone, and not “be reckoned among the nations”²—a people, whom he had “formed for himself, that they should shew forth his praise.”³ And the same difference he has been pleased to make ever since between his people and the world—in their character⁴—their way⁵—their exercises of mind⁶—their services⁷—their privileges⁸—and their prospects.⁹ At the day of judgment the separation will be complete—final—everlasting. “When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all his holy angels, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left; and these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.”¹⁰

But mark the character of the ungodly—They “*err from God’s statutes*”—not in their minds, through ignorance; but “in their hearts”¹¹ through obstinacy. They do not say—‘Lord, we *know not*’—but “*We desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*”¹² It is not frailty, but unbelief; not want of knowledge, but love of sin. It is wilful, damnable. Justly, therefore, are they stamped as the “*wicked of the earth,*” and marked out as alike objects of the Lord’s eternal frown—alike expectants of “the vengeance of eternal fire.”

And is not this a solemn word of warning to those

¹ Exod. xi. 7.

² Numb. xxiii. 9.

³ Isaiah xliii. 21.

⁴ 1 John v. 19.

⁵ Prov. xv. 9.

⁶ Rom. viii. 5.

⁷ Prov. xv. 8.

⁸ Prov. iii. 32, 33.

⁹ Daniel xii. 2.

¹⁰ Matt. xxv. 31—33, 46. Compare iii. 12; xiii. 30. Malachi iii. 16—18.

¹¹ Psalm xciv. 10.

¹² Job xxi. 14.

“that forget God”—that “they shall be turned into hell”¹—to “the proud”—that in “the day that shall burn as an oven, they shall be as stubble”²—to the worldly—that in some “night” of forgetfulness, their “souls will be required of them”³—to the “hypocrites in heart”—that they “are heaping up wrath?”⁴ Thus does the eye of faith discern through the apparent disorder and confusion of a world in ruins, the just, holy, and wise, government of God. “Clouds and darkness are round about him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.”⁵ If the wicked seem to triumph, and the righteous to be trodden down under their feet, it shall not be always so. “The end”⁶ and “wages of sin is death.”⁷ “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”⁸

How awful, then, and almost desperate their condition! “*Their deceit is falsehood;*” “deceiving and being deceived”⁹—perhaps giving up to believe their own lie—perhaps one or another “blessing themselves in their own heart,” saying “I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.”¹⁰ What then is our duty? Carnal selfishness says, ‘Be quiet—let them alone’—that is, “Destroy them by our” indolence and unfaithfulness, “for whom Christ died.”¹¹ But what does Scripture, conscience, nay more—what does common humanity say? “Cry aloud, Spare not.”¹² Awake the sleepers—sound the alarm

¹ Psalm ix. 17. •

³ Luke xii. 19, 20. Dan. v. 30.

⁵ Psalm xcvi. 2. ⁶ Rom. vi. 21.

⁸ Psalm i. 5. ⁹ 2 Tim. iii. 13.

¹¹ Compare Romans xiv. 15.

² Malachi iv. 1.

⁴ Job xxxvi. 13.

⁷ Rom. vi. 23.

¹⁰ Deut. xxix. 19.

¹² Isaiah lviii. 1.

—“ Now is the accepted time—the day of salvation ”¹ and now is the moment to lift up the prayer, and stretch forth the hand for plucking the brands out of the fire.² “ To-morrow the door may be shut, never to be opened more.”³

How awful the judgment of being “ *put away like dross!* ” Look at Saul,⁴ when “ *put away* ”—going out, to harden himself in the sullen pride and sorrow of his own heart. Hear the fearful doom of Israel—“ Son of man, the house of Israel is to me *become dross*; all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the *midst* of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore saith the Lord God—Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem, as they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnaces to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury; and I will leave you there, and melt you.”⁵ But how should this justice of the Lord’s proceedings endear his statutes to us! If the Lord were less observant of sin—less strict in its punishment as a transgression of his word—we should lose that awful display of the holiness of the word, which above every other view commends it to our love—“ Thy word is *very pure*; therefore thy servant loveth it.”⁶

120. *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

THE justice of God is a tremendously awful subject

¹ 2 Corinthians vi. 2.

² Matthew xxv. 10.

³ Ezek. xxii. 18—20.

⁴ Zech. iii. 2. Jude 23.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxviii. 5—25.

⁶ Verse 140.

of contemplation, even to those who are safely shielded from its terrors. The believer in the act of witnessing its exhibition in the Lord's righteous dealings with "*the wicked of the earth*"—cannot forbear to cry out—" *My flesh trembleth for fear of thee.*"¹ Thus did the holy men of old tremble even with a frame approaching horror in the Divine presence—" *Destruction from God,*" saith holy Job, "*was a terror to me : and by reason of his highness I could not endure.*"² Such also was the Prophet's sensation in the apprehension of the judgments of God—" *When I heard, my belly trembled ; my lips quivered at the voice ; rottenness entered into my bones.*"³ And thus, when God comes to "*tread down and put away*" his enemies for the display of the holiness of his character, and to excite the "*love*" of his people—those that stand by, secure under the covert of *their hiding-place*—cannot but "*take up their parable and say—Alas ! who shall live when God doeth this ?*"⁴ We cannot see our Father angry — (such is his "*terrible Majesty!*"⁵)—without an awful fear ; and it is this trembling in his judgments upon the ungodly, that covers us from the heavy stroke. Those that refuse to tremble shall be made to feel, while those that are "*afraid of his judgments*" shall be secure—" *Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked.*"⁶ "*I trembled myself*" — said the prophet — "*that I might rest in the day of trouble.*"⁷ Even the manifestations of his coming "*for the salvation of his*

¹ ' A thrilling horror curdles my skin.' The thing cannot be poetically expressed without periphrasis.—*Bishop Horsley.*

² Job xxxi. 23.

³ Hab. iii. 16.

⁴ Numbers xxiv. 23.

⁵ Job xxxvii. 22.

⁶ Psalm xci. 8.

⁷ Hab. iii. 16.

people" are attended with all the marks of the most fearful terror—as if his voice would shake the earth to its very foundation—"Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven—the earth feared and was still; *when* God arose to judgment, to *save all the meek of the earth.*"¹

- To distinguish this godly trembling as the character of the child of God, we need only contrast it with the exhibition of the ungodly—"Where is the God of judgment? Where is the promise of his coming? The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil"²—is the language of a scoffing world—"running upon the thick bosses of his buckler,"³ instead of "*trembling for fear of him.*" Such a spirit of "stoutness against the Lord"⁴ seems to excite the astonishment of the hosts of heaven, as most discordant to their notes of humble praise—"Who shall *not fear thee*, O Lord?—*and glorify thy name*; for *thy judgments* are made manifest."⁵ Such is the special acceptance of this trembling spirit, that some favourable symptoms of it prevailed to obtain a respite even for wicked Ahab,⁶ and a pardon for the penitent Ninevites;⁷ while its genuine "tenderness of heart" screened Josiah from the doom of his people,⁸ and will ever be regarded with the tokens of the favour of the terrible God—"To this man"—saith he, "will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and *trembleth at my word.*"⁹

Believers in Christ! Rejoice in your deliverance

¹ Psalm lxxvi. 8, 9. See the effect of a manifestation of the glory of the Saviour to the Evangelist for the purpose of special consolation and support, Rev. i. 17, 18. Compare also Daniel x. 8—17.

² Mal. ii. 17. ³ Peter iii. 4. ⁴ Zeph. i. 12. ⁵ Job xv. 26.

⁶ Mal. iii. 13.

⁷ Rev. xv. 4.

⁸ 1 Kings xxi. 27—29.

⁹ Jonah iii. 5—10.

⁹ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.

⁹ Isaiah lxvi. 2, 5.

from that "fear which hath torment."¹ Yet cherish that holy reverential fear of the character and judgments of God, which will form your most effectual safeguard "from presumptuous sins."² The very supposition, that if God had not engaged himself to you by an unchangeable covenant, his eternal judgments would have been your eternal portion, is of itself sufficient to mingle the wholesome ingredient of fear into the most established assurance. What! Can you look down into the burning bottomless gulf beneath your feet, without the recollection—If I were not immoveably fastened to "the Rock of Ages" by the strong chain of everlasting love, here must have been my abode through the countless ages of eternity: if I had not been thus upheld by the grace, as well as by the providence, of God, I might have dropped out of his hand, as one and another not more rebellious than I have fallen, into this intolerable perdition? O God! "*my flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.*"³

Thus, let it not be supposed, that the apprehension of the judgments of God is necessarily of a slavish and tormenting character. It is "his saints who are called to fear him;"⁴ and their fear, so far from "gendering unto bondage," is consistent with the strongest assurance;⁵ nay even—is its fruit and effect.⁶ It is at once the principle of present obedience⁷ and

¹ 1 John iv. 18.

² Psalm xix. 13.

³ How striking was H. Martyn's experimental apprehensions of this subject—In prayer in the evening I had such near and terrific views of *God's judgments* upon sinners in hell, that *my flesh trembled* for fear of them. The passages of God's holy word, that proved the certainty of hell torments, were brought to me in such a way as I never before felt. I flew trembling to Jesus Christ, as if the flame were taking hold of me. Oh! Christ will indeed save me or else I perish.—*Journals*, vol. i. 382.

⁴ Psalm xxxiv. 9.

⁵ Compare Hab. iii. 16, with 17, 18.

⁶ Hebrews xii. 28.

⁷ Hebrews xi. 7.

of final perseverance.¹ It is the confession of weakness, unworthiness, and sinfulness, laying us low before our God. Its use is most important in the regulation of the Christian temper. It is the "bit and bridle" that curbs the frowardness of the flesh, and enables us to "serve God acceptably" in the remembrance, that, though in love he is a reconciled Father, yet in holiness he is "a consuming fire."²

Now, if we are under the influence of this reverential awe and seriousness of spirit, we shall learn to attach a supreme authority and consideration to the least of his commands. We shall dread the thought of wilfully offending him. The fear of grieving him will be far more operative now, than the fear of hell was accustomed to be in our state of unconversion. Those who are disposed to presume upon their *gospel* liberty, will not probably understand this language. Yet is there no humble believer, that will not have observed, how intimately "the fear of the Lord" is connected with "the comfort of the Holy Ghost,"³ and with his own steady progress in holiness, and preparation for heaven.

¹ Hebrews iv. 1.

² Ib. xii. 29, with 28.

³ Acts ix. 31. Compare Matthew xxviii. 8.

PART XVI.

121. *I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.*—122. *Be surety for thy servdnt for good; let not the proud oppress me.*

THERE is something very solemn in the reflection, that God has set up a Vicegerent in the heart—an internal Judge, who takes cognizance of every thought, every emotion, every act—determining its character, and pronouncing its sentence. This tribunal tries every cause without respect to persons, time, place, or any circumstances, that may be thought to separate it from other cases under the same jurisdiction. No criminal can escape detection from defect of evidence. No earthly power can hinder the immediate execution of the sentence. The sentence then, of this awful Judge, whether “accusing or excusing,”¹ is of infinite moment. The ignorant expression—‘Thank God, I have a clear conscience!’—is used alike by the self-righteous and the careless. The awakened sinner, however, pleads guilty to the accusations of conscience, and knows not how to answer them. Blessed be God for the revelation of his Gospel, which proclaims the blood of Jesus—sprinkling the conscience—silencing its charges—and setting before the sinner the way of peace! And now *through Jesus*—“the new and living way” of access to God, conscience, sitting on the throne—speaks peace and acceptance; and though sins

¹ Romans ii. 15.

of infirmity will remain, defiling every thought, desire, and act of the soul; yet, like the motes on the face of the sun in the clearest day, they will have little or no influence to obstruct the cheerful light from shining upon the heart.¹

The clearing of conscience is however connected with integrity of Christian profession. "*If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence before God.*"² This "testimony of conscience" has often been "the rejoicing"³ of the Lord's people, when suffering under unmerited reproach or "*proud oppression.*" They have been enabled to plead it without offence in the presence of their holy, heart-searching God.⁴—nay, even when, in the near prospect of the great and final account, they might well have been supposed to shrink from the strict and unerring scrutiny of their Omniscient Judge.⁵

Perhaps, however, we are not sufficiently aware of the important connexion of moral integrity with our spiritual comfort. Mark the boldness which it gave to David in prayer. "*I have done judgment and justice; leave me not to mine oppressors.*" Can my heart and conscience respond to this appeal? Thus may I plead my cause before God—"Leave me not to my oppressors.. *Let not the proud oppress me.*" Plead my cause with them. Let my righteousness be made known. Let it be seen, that thou "wilt not leave me in their hand, nor condemn me when I am judged. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me: for I wait on thee."⁶ But if any deviation

¹ See Heb. x. 19—22.

² 1 John iii. 21.

³ 2 Cor. i. 12.

⁴ Samuel—1 Sam. xii. 3—5. Nehemiah—xiii. 14, 22. Job—x. 7. David—Psalm vii. 3—6; xviii. 20—24; xxvi. 1—6. Paul—Rom. ix. 1; and the Apostles—1 Thess. ii. 10.

⁵ Isaiah xxxviii. 1—3.

⁶ Psalm xxxvii. 33; xxv. 21.

from the exact rule of righteousness between man and man¹ has been allowed—if the world have found occasion to charge me as ungodly, because they have proved me unrighteous—then let me not wonder, that “the consolations of God shall be small with me;”² nor let me expect, a return of the Lord’s cheering manifestations, until the Achan has been removed from the camp,³ and by confession to God,⁴ and reparation to man,⁵ I have “given glory to the Lord God of Israel.”

But let not the appeal here made be thought to savour of Pharisaical pride. The highest tone of conscientious integrity is consistent with the deepest prostration of evangelical humility. The difference is infinite between the proud Pharisee and the upright believer. The Pharisee makes the appeal with undisturbed self-complacency and self-righteous pleading. The believer would ever accompany it with the prayer of the Publican—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”⁶ A deep conviction of daily deficiency and defilement constrains him instantly to append the supplication—“*Be surety for thy servant for good.*”⁷ The keen eye of the world may possibly not be able to affix any blot upon my outward profession; but, “if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities; O Lord, who shall stand?”⁸ The debt is continually accumulating, and the prospect of payment as distant as ever. I might well expect to be “*left to my oppressors,*” until I should pay all that was due⁹ unto my Lord. But

¹ Matt. vii. 12. ² Job xv. 11. Compare Psalm lxxvi. 18.

³ Josh. vii. 10—15. ⁴ Josh. vii. 19. ⁵ Luke xix. 8.

⁶ Luke xviii. 9—13.

⁷ Compare Psalm xxvi. 11. Neh. xiii. 22, with 14. Mark this unflinching testimony of integrity presented in the character of a sinner.

⁸ Psalm cxxx. 3.

⁹ Matthew xviii. 34.

behold! "Where is the fury of the oppressor?"¹ The surety is found—the debt is paid—the ransom is accepted—the sinner is free. There was a voice heard in heaven—"Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."² Yes—the Son of God himself became "surety for a stranger," and "smarted for it."³ At an infinite cost—the cost of his own precious blood—he delivered me from "*mine oppressors*"—sin—Satan—the world—death—hell. It was exacted, and he was made answerable.⁴ As Judah in the place of Benjamin, he was ready to stand in my stead before his Father—"I will be surety for him; of mine hand shalt thou require him."⁵ As Paul in the stead of Onesimus, he was ready to plead, before the same tribunal—"If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account: I will repay it."⁶

Let this subject be ever present to my mind. Well indeed was it for me, that Jesus did not "hate suretyship."⁷ Had he refused the vast undertaking, how could I have answered before the bar of God? Or had he consented to have undertaken the office only for those that loved him, again should I have been left without a plea. But when as my surety he has brought me under his yoke, and made me his "*servant*," I can plead with acceptance before his throne—"Be surety for thy servant for good."⁸ And do I not need such a surety every moment? And need I be told how fully

¹ Isaiah li. 13.² Job xxxiii. 24.³ Prov. xi. 15.⁴ Isaiah liii. 7. Bishop Lowth.⁵ Gen. xliii. 9.⁶ Philemon 18, 19.⁷ See Prov. xi. 15. last clause.

⁸ Compare Isaiah xxxviii. 14, where the same word is used in the original as in this verse. "*Be surety.*" "*Undertake for me.*" The same plea is also urged, "*Let not the proud oppress me.*" "*O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake.*" The same frame of conflict is marked, "*Mine eyes fail for thy salvation,*" verse 123. "*Mine eyes fail with looking upward.*"

Jesus has performed the Surety's part?—" So that I may boldly say"—" who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." ¹

123. *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.*

AND do thine "eyes," tried believer, begin to "fail?" So did thy Redeemer's before thee. He, whom thou hast been recollecting as thy Surety, when he stood in thy place, burdened with the intolerable load of thy sin—bearing the weighty strokes of Infinite justice upon his soul—he too was constrained to cry out—" Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." ² Listen, then, to thy deserted Saviour supporting his deserted people with his word of gracious counsels, yea, for this express purpose, " gifted with the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to you that are weary"—" Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." ³

And is not "*the word of righteousness*" a ground of trust and stay? Is it not like himself—" enduring for ever?" ⁴ Cheering indeed is the thought, that, amidst the incessant changes in Christian experience, our hope is unchangeably fixed. We may not indeed always enjoy it; but our salvation does not depend upon our present enjoyment of its consolation. The blessing is as certain—yea, *our assurance of an interest*

¹ Rom. viii. 33, 34, 1.

² Psalm lxi. 3. Comp. xxii. 1—3.

³ Isaiah l. 4, 10.

⁴ 1 Peter i. 25.

in it as clear, when we are brought to the dust under a sense of sin, as if we were "caught up into the third heaven" in a vision of glory.

In a season of desertion, therefore, while we maintain a godly jealousy over our own hearts, let us beware of a mistrustful jealousy of God. Distrust will not cure our wound, or quicken us to prayer, or recommend us to the favour of God, or prepare us for the mercy of the Gospel. Complaining is not humility. Prayer without waiting is not faith. The path is plain as noon-day. Continue to believe as you can. Wait on the Lord. This is the act of faith, depending on him—the act of hope, looking for him—the act of patience, waiting his time—the act of submission, resigned, even if he should not come. Like thy Saviour, in his "agony" of desertion, "pray more earnestly,"¹ Condemn thyself for the sins, of which thou art asking forgiveness. Bless him for his past mercy, even if thou shouldst never taste it again, Can he frown thee from his presence? Can he belie his promise to his waiting people?² Impossible! Nay! while he has taken away the sensible apprehensions of his love, and in its room kindled longing desires for the lost blessing; is not this to leave behind him the token, that if he be "verily a God that hideth himself," he is still "*the God of Israel, the Saviour?*"³ Though he delays his promise, and holds us as it were in suspense; yet he would have us fully persuaded, that he has not forgotten "*the word of his righteousness.*" But this is his wise and effectual mode of trying faith, which he has given. And it is this "*trial of faith*"—and not *faith untried*—that will be "found to

¹ Luke xxii. 44.

² Isaiah xxx. 18; xlix. 23.

³ Isaiah xlv. 15.

praise and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." ¹

The full consolation of the Gospel is therefore the fruit of patient, humble waiting for the Lord, and of earnest desire, conflicting with impatience and unbelief, and at length issuing in a state of child-like submission and dependence. The man who was here giving expression to his longing expectation for God's salvation, was evidently, though unconsciously, in possession of the promise. Nor would he at this moment have exchanged his hope, clouded as it was to his own view, for all "the pleasures of sin," or the riches of the world. Although at this moment he appeared to be under the partial hidings of his Father's countenance, yet it is important to observe, that he was not satisfied, as an indolent professor, to "lie upon his face" ² in this sad condition. His "*eyes failed with looking upward*" — stretched up with earnest expectation to catch the first rising rays of the Sun of Righteousness beaming upon his soul. He knew, what all Christians know, who walk closely with God, that his perseverance in waiting upon God would issue in the eventual fulfilment of every desire of his heart. ³

But can we assuredly plead "*the word of his*

¹ 1 Peter i. 7.

² Joshua vii. 10.

³ Fox tells us of Mr. Robert Glover, martyr at Coventry, two or three days before his death, overwhelmed with the prospect of martyrdom, and mentioning to a friend his earnest supplication for the light of God's countenance, yet without any sense of comfort. His darkness continued up to the period of his arriving within sight of the stake, when suddenly his whole soul was so filled with consolation, that he could not forbear clapping his hands, and crying out, 'He is come—he is come.' He appeared to go up to heaven in a chariot of fire, exhibiting little or no sensibility of his cruel death. Was not this the "*word of his righteousness*" to one whose "*eyes failed in looking for it?*"—*Fox's Acts and Monuments*, 1555.

righteousness” for the anticipation of the object of our desire? Have we always an express promise applicable to our expectations, and ready to “put God in remembrance”¹ of his word? Possibly we may have been asking not “according to his will,”² and therefore may have “charged God foolishly,”³ as if he had been unfaithful to his word, when no engagement had been pledged; when we may have had no warrant to build upon from “*the word of his righteousness.*” If however our petition should be found to be agreeable to his word of promise, and faith and patience hold on in submission to his will, we must not, we cannot suppose, that one tittle that we have asked will fail. Whether the Lord deliver us or not, prayer and waiting will not be lost. It is a blessed posture for the Lord to find us in, such as will not fail to ensure his best blessing, even though our request should be denied. An enlivening view of the Saviour is in reserve for us; and “*the word of righteousness*” will yet speak—“This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.”⁴ To every passing doubt and rising fear, oppose this *word of his righteousness.*

But let me bring my own heart to the test of the conflict here described. Am I longing for the manifestation of God? Surely if I am content with what I already know, it is too plain a proof, that I know but very little of the unsearchable depths of the love of Christ; and that I have abundant need to pray for more enlarged desires, and a more tender enjoyment of his Divine presence. If faith is not dead, yet it may be reduced to so low a state; as to act with little of its conquering and quickening vigour. Let me then

¹ Isaiah xliii. 26.

² 1 John v. 14. James iv. 3.

³ Job i. 22.

⁴ Isaiah xxviii. 12, also xxx. 15.

exercise my soul in diligent, careful, patient waiting upon God, equally removed from sloth and frowardness—and I shall yet find the truth of that consoling declaration of “*the word of his righteousness*”—“Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.”¹

124. *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.* — 125. *I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.*

A SENSE of *mercy*, and the privilege of Divine *teaching*, were the earnestness of the Lord’s “*salvation*” for which “*the eyes of his servant were failing*,” and for which he was waiting in dependence upon the sure “*word of his righteousness*.” And indeed these two wants daily press upon every “*servant*” of God, and bring him in the character of a wrestling supplicant to the throne of grace. As it respects the first—if there is a sinner upon the earth who needs the special *mercy of God*, it is his own “*servant*.” For as the Lord sees abundantly more excellence in the feeblest desire of his heart, than in the most splendid external duties of the professor; so he sees far more sinfulness and provocation in the workings of sin in his heart, than in the palpably defective services of professors, or in the open transgression of “*the wicked of the earth*.” Let him scrutinize his motives, thoughts, and affections, even in his moments of nearest and happiest approach unto his God; and he will find such defilement cleaving to every offering, with all the aggrava-

¹ Psalm xcvi. 11. The same plea under similar circumstances of conflict is urged, Psalm cxliii. 1.

tions of mercy, light and knowledge, vouchsafed, that the confession of his soul, when comparing himself with his fellow-sinners, will be—"Of whom I am chief."¹ And therefore, if I am a "*servant of God*," I can bring my services before him only upon the ground of "*mercy*;" feeling that for my best performances I need an immeasurable world of mercy—pardoning—saving—everlasting mercy; and yet emboldened by the blood of Jesus to plead for my soul—"Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy."

But then I am ignorant as well as guilty; and yet I dare not pray for the Lord's teaching—much and hourly as I need it—until I have afresh obtained mercy. The two blessings which I here implore lead me at once to the foundations of the gospel—in the work of Christ, and the work of the Spirit—*mercy* flowing from the blood of the Son²—*teaching* from the office of the Spirit.³ "*Mercy*" is the first blessing, not only in point of importance, but in point of order. I must seek the Lord, and know him as a Saviour, before I can go to him with any confidence to be my teacher. But when once I have found acceptance to my petition—"Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy"—my way will be opened to follow on my petition—"Teach me thy statutes. Give me understanding that I may know thy testimonies"—that I may know, walk, yea—"run in the way of thy commandments"⁴ with an enlarged heart. My plea is the same as I have before urged *with acceptance*—"I am thine—thy servant."⁵

But if I am *the Lord's servant*, how did I become so? Time was (let me be ashamed and confounded in the remembrance of it) when I was engaged for

¹ 1 Tim. i. 15.

² Eph. i. 7.

³ John xiv. 26; xvi. 13.

⁴ Verse 32.

⁵ Verse 94. Psalm cxliii. 12.

another master, and lived in an opposite service.¹ But the free, sovereign grace of Jesus called me from the dominion of sin—from the chains of Satan—from the bondage of the world, and drew me to himself. “His I am—and him I serve.”² His service is my highest privilege: his reward of grace is my glorious prospect. “*If any man serve me,*” saith my Master, “*let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*”³ As his servant, therefore, I cast myself with confidence upon his *mercy*, and expect to be “*dealt with according to that mercy.*” Nay—I shall be denied nothing that I “ask according to his will.” For he has condescended to call me—not “*his servant,*” but “*his friend,*”⁴—yea more—to call himself “*my brother.*”⁵

Lord! thou hast shewed me thy great favour and grace to be “*thy servant.*” I would be thine for ever. I love thy service too well to wish to change it; yet must I mourn over my dulness, my backwardness in doing thy will, and walking in thy way. Oh “*teach me thy statutes*” more clearly, more experimentally! “*Give me understanding*” to discern their heavenly sweetness and their holy liberty, that I may live in a more simple and devoted obedience to them, until I come to see thy face, and to be “*thy servant*” in thy heavenly temple, “*no more to go out.*”⁶

126. *It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law.*

If I have a desire for a more spiritual *understanding* of the revelation of God, how can I but mourn

¹ Rom. vi. 16, 20. Titus iii. 3.

² John xii. 26.

⁵ John xx. 17. Heb. i. 11, 12.

² Acts xxvii. 23.

⁴ John xv. 15.

⁶ Rev. vii. 15; iij. 12.

to witness the awful neglect and contempt of that revelation from the ungodly world? Indeed it is one of the distinguishing features of the character of the Lord's people, that they "sigh and cry for all the abominations of the land"¹—that they cannot hear or see the name of God dishonoured, without feeling as for the wounded reputation of their Father and their Friend.² They cannot suffer the world quietly to go on their course. They are anxious to throw in their weight of influence, whatever it may be, to stem the torrent flowing along them: and when (as, alas! is too often the case) they find all their efforts unavailing, they carry their cause to the Lord. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work." Nor does this deprecation contradict the law of love, which requires us to love, pray for, and to bless, our enemies:³ for the Lord's people are not angry for their own cause, but for his. David had no regard to his own honour, but to God's

¹ Ezekiel ix. 4.

² What a Christian ought to feel under these circumstances, let us learn from the following extract of the diary of the saintly Martyn. Upon hearing at Shiraz in the course of his disputations some reproach of his Saviour's name, he writes thus—'I was cut to the soul by this blasphemy. In prayer I could think of nothing else but that great day, when the Son of God should come in the clouds of heaven, "taking vengeance on them that know not God," and convince men of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him.' (We might almost think that this verse was upon his mind at this moment.) 'Mirza Seid Ali perceived that I was considerably disordered, and was sorry for having repeated the verse, but asked, what it was that was so offensive. I told him, that I could not endure existence, if Jesus was not glorified; that it would be hell to me, if he were to be always thus dishonoured. He was astonished, and again asked the reason why. 'If any one pluck out your eyes,' I replied, 'there is no saying why you feel pain. It is feeling. It is because I am one with Christ, that I am thus dreadfully wounded.' On his again apologizing, I told him, 'that I rejoiced at what had happened, inasmuch as it made me feel nearer the Lord than ever. *It is when the head or heart is struck, that every member feels its membership.*'—*Martyn's Life*, p. 420, 8vo. edition.

³ Matt. v. 44.

law. He had not injured his enemies. He had laboured to "overcome their evil with good." He had often wept for their sins, and prayed for their conversion. But all was in vain. 'Now, Lord, take the rod into thine own hand. "It is time *for thee*, Lord, to work.'" This was true zeal—zeal of the Spirit, not of the flesh. How gracious is our God in permitting his servants thus to plead with him, and, as it were, to give him no rest, until"¹ he shall arise, and "*work*," and sit upon the throne of the kingdoms of the earth!

Let us then be found on the Lord's side—labouring for sinners—pleading with their hardness and rebellion in our Master's name, and for our Master's sake. Let all the weight of personal exertion and influence, consistent example, and wrestling supplication, be concentrated in "coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty."² Let us see to it, that we have the testimony of conscience, that, if we cannot do what we would, we do what we can.³ And if at last overborne by the torrent of ungodliness, we shall find our refuge and rest in pleading with our Lord for the honour of his name—"Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed, thy name."⁴ The Lord's "*time to work*" will come; and of this he has given his most solemn warning to the ungodly world—"My Spirit shall not always strive with man."⁵ Often—when the Lord has seen "*it time for him to work, when they have made void his law*"—have his judgments made the earth to tremble. "Sodom and Gomorrah" have "known the power of his anger," and are "set forth for an example, suffering the

¹ Isaiah lxii. 7.² Judges v. 23.³ Mark xiv. 8.⁴ Psalm lxxiv. 18, also verses 10, 11.⁵ Gen. vi. 3.

vengeance of eternal fire.”¹ And when his “*time to work*” is fully come, what is all the resistance of earth and hell, but as “setting the briars and thorns against him in battle?” “*I would*”—saith he—“*go through them. I would burn them together.*”² A word—a frown—a look—is destruction. “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength. Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?”³ Or “who hath resisted his will?”⁴

But what shall we say of that stupendous instance of the mightiness of his hand, by which—when men “*had made void his law*”—when no restrictions could bind, no forbearance win them—when he “saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor, *therefore his arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness, it sustained him?*”⁵ Surely, if we could conceive the hosts of heaven to have taken up this expression of ardent concern for the glory of God—“*It is time, for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law*”—they could little have thought of such a *work* as this—they could never have conceived to themselves such an unlooked-for display of power, justice, and mercy meeting in one glorious work. To set at nought then this *work*—is it not to refuse all hope—all remedy? To persist in “*making void the law*” after so magnificent an exhibition of the working of God—must it not expose the transgressors to reap the fruit of their own obstinacy, and to prepare to meet him as their Judge, whom they refuse to receive as their Saviour? Nor must they wander, if the Lord’s people, with a holy indignation against sin, and fervour of zeal for his glory, should appeal to

¹ Jude 7.

³ Job ix. 4.

² Isaiah xxvii. 4.

⁴ Romans ix. 19.

⁵ Isaiah lix. 16.

his faithfulness for the fulfilment of his judgments—
*“It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made
 void thy law.”*

127. *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold;
 yea, above fine gold.*

THE scorn and reproach, which the commandments of God meet with from the world, serve to enhance their value in the estimation of the Lord's people. *“Gold—yea fine gold”*—the hope, confidence, and idol of the worldling,¹ and the love of which has been the ruin of thousands²—has no glory in their eyes, compared with the word of God. Again and again they are ready to exalt its praises, as *“more to be desired than gold; yea, than much fine gold.”*³ *“The merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. It is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto it.”*⁴ Here has the Lord unlocked to his people his golden treasure, and enriched their souls with *“the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*

The image employed brings before us the picture of the miser. His heart and treasure are in his gold. With what delight he counts it! with what watchfulness he keeps it! hiding it in safe custody, lest he should be despoiled of that which is dearer to him than life. Such should Christians be! spiritual misers: counting their treasure which is *“above fine gold;”* and *“hiding it in their heart,”*⁵ in safe keeping,

¹ Job xxxi. 24.

² 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

³ Psalm xix. 10.

⁴ Prov. iii. 14, 15.

⁵ Verse 11. Augustine tells us of himself, that while a Manichee, he slighted the Scripture for the plainness of its style, which appeared to him (from a false standard of criticism) not to be compared with the dignity of Ciceronian eloquence. (*Visa mihi est indigna scrip-*

where the great despoiler shall not be able to reach it. Oh, Christians! how much more is your portion to you than the miser's treasure! Hide it; watch it; retain it. You need not be afraid of covetousness in spiritual things: rather "covet earnestly"¹ to increase your store; and by living upon it, and living in it, it will grow richer in extent, and more precious in value.

But have I through Divine grace been enabled to withdraw my love from the unworthy objects, which once possessed it; and to fix it on that which alone offers satisfaction? Let me attempt to give a reason to myself of the high estimation in which I hold it, as infinitely transcending those things which the world ventures their all—even their temporal happiness—to obtain. "*Therefore I love the commandments of God above gold; yea, above fine gold*"—because, while the world and my own heart have only combined to flatter me, *they* have discovered to me my real state, as a self-deceived,² guilty,³ defiled⁴ sinner before God: because they have been as a "school-master to bring me to Christ,"⁵ and therefore the Lord's blessed means of guiding me to the only remedy for sin, the only rest for my soul. "*I love them;*" because they have often supplied wholesome reproof in my wanderings; and plain direction in my perplexity. "*I love them:*" because they restrict me from that, which would prove my certain ruin; and because in the way of obedience to them, the Lord

tura quam Tullianæ dignitati compararem. Confess. lib. iii. cap. 5.) But after his blessed acquaintance with Christ, though Tully was still read with pleasure, yet this thing alone—said he—abated his former interest, *that the name of Christ was not there.* Lib. iii. cap. 4.

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 31.

³ James ii. 10.

² Romans vii. 9.

⁴ Romans vii. 14.

⁵ Gal. iii. 24.

has "accepted me with my sweet savour."¹ Should I not "love them?" Can "Gold, yea, fine gold," offer to me blessings such as these? Can it heal my broken heart? Can it give relief to my wounded spirit? Has it any peace or prospect of comfort for me on my death-bed? And what cannot—what has not—what will not—the precious word of God do at that awful season of trial? "O my God, I would be deeply ashamed, that *"I love thy commandments"* no better than I do—that they are so little influential upon my conduct—that they so often give place to objects of comparative nothingness in thy sight. O that my heart might be wholly and habitually exercised in thy precepts, that I may find the "work of righteousness to be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever!"²

128. *Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

THE effect of Divine grace will be visible upon the judgment, as well as upon the affections. Not only will the Christian in the fervour of his heart "*love the commandments even above fine gold;*" but his "love will abound yet more and more *in knowledge and in all judgment.*"³ This will lead to an intelligent and *universal* regard to them, "*esteeming all the precepts concerning all things to be right.*" This constitutes the Christian's separate and exclusive character. His separation indeed from the thoughtless worldling is "known and read of all men." But his difference from the professor of religion, though really as marked in the sight of God, is far less perceptible to general observation. Consisting

¹ Ezekiel xx. 41. Compare Isaiah lxiv. 5.

² Isaiah xxxii. 17.

³ Philippians i. 9.

more in the state of heart, than in any external mark of distinction, it is often only within the ken of that eye, whose sovereign prerogative it is to "search the heart,"¹ and to "weigh the spirits."²

Many would profess to "*esteem the precepts to be right,*" so far as they inculcate the practice of those moral virtues, of which they may be able to present some faint exhibition, and demand the abandonment of those sins, from the external influence of which they may have been delivered. But when they begin to observe the "exceeding breadth of the commandment"³—how it takes cognizance of the heart—and enforces the renunciation of the world, the crucifixion of sin, and the entire surrender of the heart unto God; this searching touchstone of profession separates them from the church, and exposes to the light of open day the brand of hypocrisy upon their foreheads. But *All* is the Christian's word. He is attentive to every duty, and every circumstance and obligation of duty. He loves the evangelical as well as the moral *precepts*—those that teach him to renounce himself in every part (his sins as a source of pleasure, and his duties as a ground of dependence): and to believe in him as the only ground of hope, whom "the Father sent to be the Saviour of the world."⁴ He never complains of the strictness of the *precepts*; but he is continually humbled in the recollection of his nonconformity to them. "*Every way,*" however pleasing to the flesh, that is opposed to the revealed will of God, is "*hated,*" as "*false*" in itself, and "*false*" to his God. This "godly sincerity" will apply to every part of the Christian Directory. So that any plea offered for the indulgence of sin (as if it admitted of palliation, or was compensated by some surplus duty, or allowed

¹ Jeremiah xvii. 10.

² Proverbs xvi. 2.

³ Verse 96.

⁴ 1 John iii. 23. John vi. 29.

only for some temporary purpose) or any wilful shrinking from the *universality* of obedience—blots out all pretensions to uprightness of heart. If holiness be *really loved*, it will be loved for its own sake; and *equally loved and followed in every part*.¹ By this entire “approval of things that are excellent,” we shall “be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ.”²

O my soul, canst thou abide this close test of “godly sincerity?” Hast thou as much regard to the precepts and duties, as to the privileges and comforts of the Gospel? Is no precept evaded from repugnance to the cross that is entailed to it? Is no secret lust retained? Art thou content to let all go? If my hatred of sin is sincere, I shall hate it more in my own house than abroad; I shall hate it most of all in my own heart. Here lies the grand seat of hypocrisy. And therefore may the great Searcher of hearts enable me to search into its depths!—May I take the lamp of the Lord to penetrate into its dark interior hiding-places of evil! May I often put the question to my conscience—‘What does the Omniscient “Observer of men” know of my heart?’ Perhaps at the time that the Church holds my name in esteem, the voice of conscience, as the voice of God, may whisper to me—“That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”³ Some false way, yet undetected within, may keep me lifeless and unfruitful in the midst of the quickening means of grace. Let me look into my house—my calling—my family—my soul; and in the course of this search how much matter will be found for prayer, contrition, renewed determination of heart, and dependence upon my God! “*O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! I will keep thy statutes;*

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

² Phil. i. 10.

³ Luke xvi. 15.

O forsake me not utterly."¹ And oh! let my spirit be wounded by every fresh discovery of sin. Let my soul bleed under it. But *specially and instantly* let me apply to the "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." Here let me wash my soul from the guilt of sin, and regain my peace with God. And to him, who opened this fountain, let me also repair for a large supply of spiritual strength. May his power and grace sharpen my weapons for the spiritual conflict, until every secret iniquity is overcome, and for ever dispossessed from my heart!

¹ Verses 5, 8.

PART XVII.

129. *Thy testimonies are wonderful ; therefore doth my soul keep them.*

THE unsearchable depth of the words of God will make the believer a learner to the end of his life. Even he, who “ was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter,”¹ was brought to the same adoring contemplation of the revelation of God—“ O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! ”² Every way indeed is this revelation worthy of him, the first title of whose name is “ Wonderful.”³ It lays open to the heaven-taught soul, what “ eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man.”⁴ Think of the Creator of the world becoming a creature—yea—“ a curse for ”⁵ man. Think of man—guilty and condemned—made just with God by a righteousness not his own.⁶ Think of God bringing out of the ruinous fall more glory to himself, and more happiness to man, than from his former innocence—in the display of his mercy—the glory of his justice, and the investment of sinners—not, as before, with a creature’s righteousness, security, and reward—but with his own righteousness,⁷ guardianship,⁸ and glory.⁹ Think how “ the way into the

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 4.

² Romans xi. 33.

³ Isaiah ix. 6.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

⁵ John i. 1—3, with Gal. iii. 13. Phil. ii. 6—8.

⁶ Romans iii. 19—22.

⁷ Jer. xxiii. 6. 1 Cor. i. 30.

⁸ John vi. 39 ; x. 28. Colossians iii. 3, 4.

⁹ John xvii. 21—24. Revelations iii. 21.

holiest of all is" thus "made manifest."¹ Think how abounding grace is the death as well as the pardon of sin²—the present as well as the everlasting life of the soul.³ These are among the stupendous discoveries of the sacred book, that constrain the acknowledgment from the humble and reflecting mind—" *Thy testimonies are wonderful.*" Let us therefore join with the Apostle, to "bow our knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—that we "might be able to comprehend *with all saints*" (for blessed be God! the privilege is common to all his people) "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the" unsearchable "love of Christ,"⁴ "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."⁵

And how delightful is the recollection of these "testimonies" being our "*heritage for ever.*"⁶ For they are scarcely less "*wonderful*" in their practical fulness, than in their deep unfathomable mysteries of love. Such is the infinite enlargement of this our "heritage," that he, who foreknew every thought that would find an entrance into the minds of his people, has secretly laid up in these "*testimonies,*" a word of reasonable direction and encouragement for every, even the most minute, occasion and circumstance of need to the end of their days. Here again is wrapped up, in words fitted by wisdom to receive the revelation, all that intercourse between God and man, throughout all ages of the Church, which is treasured up in the vast unsearchable depository of the Divine mind and purpose. Can we then forbear repeating the exclamation—" *Thy testimonies are wonderful?*"

We should not however be satisfied with 'adoring

¹ Heb. ix. 8, with x. 19, 20.

² Rom. v. 20, with vi. 1—6.

³ John iv. 14; vi. 57; xiv. 6, 19.

⁴ Eph. iii. 14, 18, 19.

⁵ Colossians ii. 3.

⁶ Verse 111. †

the fulness of Scripture,'¹ without seeking to imbibe and exhibit its practical influence. With the child of God, holy admiration of the "*testimonies*" will kindle spiritual devotedness to them—"Therefore doth my soul keep them." The stamp of Divine authority upon them, while it deepens his reverence, commands his steady and cheerful obedience. To keep them is his privilege, no less than his obligation. It is a path, in which he delights to walk perseveringly to the end.

But how affecting is the thought of the mass, who look at these wonders with a careless or unmeaning eye, unconscious of their interesting import! They pass by the door of the treasury, hardly condescending to look aside into it; or at best only taking a transient glance, which presents nothing to their eyes of its inexhaustible stores. "*I have written to them,*" saith the Lord, "*the great things of my law: but they are counted as*

¹ 'Adoro plenitudinem Scripturarum' was the exclamation of Tertullian—in which posture of holy admiration—said the deeply-learned and pious Dr. Owen—I desire my mind may be found while I am in this world.'

'What do I not owe to the Lord for permitting me to take a part in the translation of his word? Never did I see such wonders, and wisdom, and love, in the blessed book, as since I have been obliged to study every expression; and it is a delightful reflection, that death cannot deprive us of the pleasure of studying its mysteries.'—Martyn's Life, p. 271. The same testimony was given by a kindred spirit employed in the same work. Shortly before his death, Dr. Buchanan, giving to a friend some details of his laborious revisions of his Syriac Testament, suddenly stopped, and burst into tears. On recovering himself—he said—'I am not ill, but I was completely overcome with the recollection of the delight which I had enjoyed in this exercise. At first I was disposed to shrink from the task as irksome, and apprehended that I should find even the Scriptures fail by the frequency of this critical examination. But so far from it, every fresh perusal seemed to throw fresh light on the word of God, and to convey additional joy and consolation to my mind.' 'How delightful'—observes his biographer—is the contemplation of a servant of Christ thus devoutly engaged in his heavenly Master's work, almost to the very moment of his transition to the Divine source of light and truth itself.'

a strange thing."¹ But far more wonderful is it, that we, enlightened in some measure, in answer to prayer,² with "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation"³—should often be so indifferent to the mysteries of redeeming love here unfolded before us, and should experience so little of their practical influence! Oh! let the recollection of our indolence, and want of conformity to them, never cease to humble us. Let us not enter into *the testimonies of God* as a dry task, or an ordinary study; but let us concentrate our minds, our faith, humility, and prayer, in a more devoted contemplation of them. Every such exercise will extend our view of those parts, with which we had conceived ourselves to have been competently acquainted: and a new field of wonders will open on every side, far beyond our present contracted apprehensions.⁴

And can any joy be imagined so sublime as the adoring contemplation of the revelation of God? It is the constant employment of angels. It engages their every faculty with intense admiration and delight.⁵ And while they behold and worship with self-abasement, their obedience is lively. "With twain he" (the seraphim before the throne) "covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, *and with*

¹ Hosea viii. 12.

² See verse 18.

³ Ephesians i. 7—9.

⁴ Augustine found this so experimentally true, that he tells us, 'that though he should with better capacity and greater diligence study all his life-time, from the beginning of his childhood to decrepit age, nothing else but the Holy Scriptures; yet they are so compacted and thickly set with truths, that he might daily learn something which before he knew not.'—Aug. Epis.

To this truth the late venerable Antistes Hess set his seal at the age of eighty-six, when he informed a young missionary of the Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, that 'for seventy years the word of God had been the daily object of his unremitting researches: and that still he discovered in it new traces of the mysterious love and wisdom of God.'—Jewish Expositor, Nov. 1825.

⁵ See 1 Peter i. 12.

twain he did fly."¹ Thus may we study the same lessons, and with the same spirit! May our contemplation humble us in the dust, and animate us in the service of our God! "*Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore doth my soul keep them.*"

130. *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.*

' So "*wonderful are thy testimonies,*" gracious God, that even by touching as it were only the threshold of them, "*the entrance of thy words giveth light and understanding unto*" my heart.' The study, commenced in simplicity and prayer, opens an "*entrance*" to the word with its first dawning "*light*" into the soul; often only sufficient to make darkness visible, but "*shining more and more unto the perfect day.*"² Indeed all the spiritual light known in this dark world has flowed from the Word of God, forcing its "*entrance,*" like the beams of the sun, upon the opening eyes of "a man that was born blind." It is one of the most striking instances of Divine condescension, that this Word—so "*wonderful*" in its high and heavenly mysteries—should yet open a path so plain, that the poorest and most illiterate may find and walk in it. Indeed *the entrance of the word* into unintellectual and uncultivated minds, often gives an enlargement and elevation of thought, which is like the earnest of the restoration of man to his original glory, when doubtless every mental as well as spiritual faculty was "filled with all the fulness of God."³ So astonishing is the power of this heavenly light, that from any one page of this holy book, a child, or even an idiot, under the

¹ Isaiah vi. 2.

² Proverbs iv. 18.

³ Eph. iii. 19. Compare Col. iii. 10.

teaching of God, may draw more instruction than the most acute philosopher could ever obtain from any other fountain of light! nay—he may acquire a more intelligent perception of its contents, than the student, untaught by the Spirit of God, who may have devoted to the study of it the persevering industry of many successive years. For very possible is it to be possessed of all the treasures of literature, and yet to remain in total ignorance of every thing that is most important for a sinner to know.¹ The Apostle's apparently paradoxical rule is—"If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."² We do not mean to disparage human wisdom; but it is *the pride of wisdom*, so opposed to the simplicity of the gospel, which prevents us from "sitting at the feet of Jesus, and hearing his word." This it is, which makes the teacher instruct in "the words of man's wisdom," rather than in the knowledge of "Christ and him crucified;"³ and which hinders the learner from receiving Christ in the light and love of the truth.

It is painful to remember how much light may be shining around us on every side, without finding an "entrance" into the heart. "The light shineth in

¹ 'A very extraordinary thing,' said one, 'if I, who have read the Bible over and over in the original languages, have studied it day and night, and have written criticisms and comments on it—a very extraordinary thing, that I should not be able to understand that meaning in the Scriptures, which is said to be so plain, that a "wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err" in the discovering of it.' And so it is extraordinary, till we open the Bible; and there we see the fact explained. The man who approaches the word of God in his own wisdom shall not find, what the "fool" will discover under the teaching of Divine wisdom. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent"—and "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise."—Cecil's Remains.

² 1 Corinthians iii. 18.

³ Compare Ibid. ii. 1—4.

darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”¹ Not only the pride of human reasoning, but the love of sin, shuts out the light—“Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”² And thus in a vast multitude of cases, because “the eye is evil, the whole body is full of darkness;” and “if the light that is in them is darkness, how great is that darkness!”³ Most awful is the view given us of the conflict between the contending powers of light and darkness—“The god of this world blinding the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”—the Almighty God resisting his hateful influence, and shining into the hearts “of his people, “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”⁴ How necessary is it to watch vigilantly against every disposition to refuse admission to the light of God! How much more “*entrance*” would have been given to the word, and consequently how much greater would have been the diffusion of light in the soul, were we as earnest and diligent in secret prayer for heavenly teaching, as we are accustomed to be in the public hearing of the word.

But the enthusiast is not satisfied with the light of the word. Led by the delusion of his own heart, he expects a light within—an immediate revelation of the Spirit, independent of the word. It cannot however be safe to separate the light of the Spirit from the light of the word. The word indeed moves in subserviency to the Spirit, but the light of the

¹ John i. 5, “apprehended it not.”—Scott. “Admitted it not,”—Campbell.

² Ibid. iii. 19, 20.

³ Matthew vi. 23.

⁴ Compare 2 Corinthians iv. 4—6.

Spirit is no where promised as dissociated from the word. If it does not always guide directly by the word, yet its influence is only perceptible in the direction of the word. The word is in the matter, if not in the mode; and, though the Spirit may by immediate light direct us to any path of duty, yet it is invariably to that path, which had been previously marked by the light of the word. Thus the Spirit and the word conjointly become the guide of our way—the Spirit enlightening and quickening the word—and the word never failing to evidence the light of the Spirit. Nor will their combined influence ever leave the church of God, until she has joyfully and completely entered into Immanuel's land, where she shall need no other light, than that of the glory of God, and of the Lamb, which shall shine in her for ever.¹

But—Reader—rest not satisfied with whatever measure of light may have been hitherto vouchsafed. Seek that the word may have “an entrance ministered unto you *abundantly*.” The most advanced believer is he, who is most ready to acknowledge, how much of the word yet remains unexplored before him.² Cultivate the disposition of simplicity—the spirit of a “little child”³—willing to receive, embrace, submit to, whatever the revelation of God may produce before you. It is to this spirit that the promise of heavenly light is exclusively made—“The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise *the simple*. The meek will he guide in judgment; *the meek* will he teach his way,”⁴ It is beautiful to see a man, like Solomon, endued with enlarged powers of mind⁵—acknowledg-

¹ See Revelation xxi. 23.

² See the testimonies adduced in the notes on the preceding verse.

³ Matthew xviii. 3.

⁴ Psalm xix. 7; xxv. 9.

⁵ 1 Kings iv. 29—34.

ing himself to be a little child; ¹ afraid of trusting in his own light; and seeking instruction diligently in prayer and meditation upon the Word. But never will a proud unhumbled mind know the benefit of this Divine instruction. To such a student, the Bible must ever be a dark book; since it is its very design to destroy that disposition, which they bring to the inquiry. That knowledge therefore, which is unable to direct our way to heaven—nay, which by closing the avenues of spiritual light, obstructs our entrance thither, is far more a curse than a blessing. Far more glorious is the simplicity of the word than the wisdom of the world.

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said; I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” ²

131. *I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments.*

WHEN the “wonderful” character of God’s “testimonies” is apprehended; and when their “entrance has given light to the soul:” something far beyond ordinary affection and desire is excited. A thirsty man—burning with inward heat on a sultry day, and “opening his mouth, and panting” for some alleviation of his thirst—is the expressive image employed to describe the overwhelming desire of the child of God for the attainment of his object. Or, if we suppose before us the man nearly exhausted by the heat of his race, and “opening his mouth and panting” to

¹ 1 Kings iii. 7.

² Luke x. 21.

take in fresh breath to renew his course; not more naturally does "the sun rejoice as a strong man to run his race"¹ in the heaven, than the spiritual man to run his race to glory.² He cannot satisfy himself in his desires. The motions of his soul to his God are his life and his joy. It is a spring of perpetual motion beating within—perpetual because natural—a principle, having indeed its fastings and its sickness, but still returning to its original spring of life and vigour. It seems as if the soul could never draw in enough of the influences of the spiritual life. Its longings are insatiable. It is as if the heart would "break with"³ the overpowering strength of its own desires, until at length tired with the weariness of the conflict, the believer "*opens his mouth, and pants*" to fetch in a fresh supply of invigorating grace. Thirsty for "a little reviving,"⁴ he finds it in the enjoyment of the commandments of the Lord; enjoying the Lord himself in the way of his commandments, as the well-spring of refreshment to his soul.⁵

Hear the man of God giving, or rather attempting to give, expression to his "*pantings*" in other Psalms— "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land."⁶ Thus was it, that Job "*opened his mouth, and panted.*"—"O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even unto his seat!"⁷— And the church, when she was able to pour out her

¹ Psalm xix. 5.

² For another illustration of this image, see Job xxix. 23.

³ Verse 20.

⁴ Ezra ix. 8.

⁵ See on verse 20.

⁶ Psalm xlii. 1; lxiii. 1; cxliii. 6.

⁷ Job xxiii. 3.

heart before the Lord—"With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."¹ St. Paul also describes the same intenseness of desire in his own experience—"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."² But amidst all these examples, and *infinitely beyond them all*—behold the ardour of our blessed Master in his work. Such was the "*panting*" of his heavenly desire, that, when "wearied with his journey," and "sitting at Jacob's well," he forgot even his natural want for his thirsty frame, in the fulfilment of his desire of the conversion of a lost sinner to himself.³

Nor let us be satisfied, unless our affections are thus engaged in full and constant exercise.⁴ The soul must be kept open to heavenly influence; so that, when the Lord touches us with conviction, inclines our hearts to himself, and constrains us to his service, we may be ready to "exercise ourselves unto godliness,"⁵ in receiving, cherishing, and improving the heavenly "*longing after his commandments*;" and may "*open our mouths and pant*" for more advanced progress in them. It is not so much the quantity, as the activity

¹ Isaiah xxvi. 9. ² Phil. iii. 12—14. ³ John iv. 6, 31—34.

⁴ 'Be always displeas'd with what thou art, if thou desirest to attain to what thou art not: for where thou hast pleas'd thyself, there thou abidest. But if thou sayest—'I have enough'—thou perishest. Always add—always walk—always proceed. Neither stand still, nor go back, nor deviate.'—Augustine.

⁵ 1 Tim. iv. 7.

of faith that we regard ; always at work, stirring up a holy fire within, for the utmost stretch of human attainment ; like men of large projects and high determinations, still aspiring to more of God, both in the enjoyment of his love, and in conformity to his will. And shall we be ashamed of these feelings? Shall we not rather be deeply humbled, that we know so little of them—encouraged, if we have any springing of them—alarmed, if we be utterly destitute of their influence? Shall we not be “ *opening our mouth, and panting,*” when any new path of service is opened before us? For if we are content to be strangers to this “ *longing* ” after God—this readiness for duty ; nothing else can be expected, but “ sliding back from the Lord by a perpetual backsliding.”¹ Growing in sin, declining in love, and gradually relinquishing the habit of prayer, we shall shortly find little attaching to us in the Gospel but the empty name—*Christianity without Christ*. The world will despise the spiritual exercises of the man of God as enthusiasm, the distemper of a misguided imagination. But is it—can it be—otherwise than a “ reasonable service,”² as well as a bounden obligation, to give up our whole desires to him, who alone is worthy of them? There can be no evidence of their sincerity, unless they are supreme.

But let the spring of this holy ardour be kept in motion in union with Christ, and the life flowing from him. Thus shall I enjoy a more habitual influence of the love of Christ—that all-constraining principle, which overcomes all my complaints of coldness and deadness of heart, and fills me with *panting and longing* in the service of my God. What then—let

¹ Jeremiah viii. 5.

² Romans xii. 1.

me ask myself—is the pulse of my desires after spiritual things? Do I pant, thirst, long, after the enjoyment of heavenly pleasure? Do I mourn¹ over, and conflict with that indolence and indifference of spirit, which so often hinders my race? Oh! let me be found a frequent suppliant at the throne of grace; bewailing my dulness, yet “stirring up” my faith “to lay hold on”¹ my God; seeking for larger views of the Gospel, a warmer experience of its promises, a more intense appetite for its enjoyments, and a more devoted attachment to its service. Surely such desires will issue in the confidence of faith. “*My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness.*”²

132. *Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.*

THE highest ardency of holy desire is not presented to God as any ground of satisfaction. Nor does the believer in his most elevated moments forget his proper character—always a sinner—needing mercy every moment in every duty. His prayer for mercy therefore suitably follows his exalted expression of love—“*Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me.*” Mercy is indeed secured to him beyond the powers of earth and hell to despoil him of it; but the comfortable sense of this mercy is vouchsafed only according to the strength of his desires, and the earnestness and simplicity of his faith. And this is indeed a blessing, with which no earthly source of satisfaction will be “worthy to be compared.” What are all the riches of the world, without it, but splendid poverty—as little able to supply the place of Jesus in the

¹ Isaiah lxiv. 7.

² Psalm lxiii. 5.

soul, as the magnificent array of the starry firmament to compensate for the absence of the sun? It is night with the child of God—Egyptian night—“darkness which may be felt,”¹ until his Sun appear to chase away his griefs and gloom—until his Lord manifests himself in answer to his cry—“*Look thou upon me and be merciful unto me.*”

To have this portion of “*those that love the name*” of God is then the grand object of desire. To have our offering, as Abel’s was,² accepted with God—to walk as Enoch walked,³ with God—to commune with him as Abraham,⁴ and Moses,⁵ were privileged to do—to be conformed with the holy Apostle⁶ to the death of Christ—in a word to be interested in all the purchase of a Saviour’s blood—“this is the heritage of the Lord’s servants,”—this is the “one thing that we have desired of the Lord, and are seeking after,”⁷ —“this,”—we can testify with the dying Psalmist—“is all our salvation, and all our desire.”⁸ “Remember me then, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance.”⁹

And yet, alas! how often has the power and deceitfulness of sin cast us into so lifeless a state, that we are not only living without the enjoyment of this portion, but at rest without it; scarcely knowing or caring whether the Lord look on us or not. Can we wonder, that our gracious long-suffering God, should “hide himself,”¹⁰ and “go, and return to his place?”¹¹

¹ Exodus x. 21.

² Genesis iv. 4*

³ Ibid. v. 24.

⁴ Gen. xviii. 17—33.

⁵ Exod. xxxiii. 11. Deut. xxxiv. 10.

⁶ Phil. iii. 10. Gal. ii. 20.

⁷ Psalm xxvii. 4.

⁸ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

⁹ Psalm cvi. 4, 5.

¹⁰ Isaiah lvii. 17.

¹¹ Hosea v. 15.

His next manifestation will probably be in the way of sharp conviction, making us to feel our distance, our coldness, our barrenness; and this contrast of our sad condition with those who are walking in the favour of their God, will again bring forth the cry—“*Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.*” An answer to this prayer offered in the humility, earnestness, and perseverance of faith, though it may be awhile delayed, will surely never be forgotten.¹ If therefore we cannot yet “sing in the ways of the Lord,”² yet let us not cease to mourn after him, till he *look upon us*, and “satisfy us with his mercy.”³ And oh! let us remember, that there is but one way, through which one gracious look, or one expression of tender mercy, can ever visit our souls. Let our eyes and heart then be ever fixed on Jesus. It is only in this his “beloved” Son that the Lord can *look upon us*, so as not to “behold iniquity in us.” But we “are complete in Him.”⁴ Here then let us wait, until he “*look upon us.*” And when this our prayer has received its answer in the Lord’s best time—whether it be in “the goings of our God in the sanctuary,”⁵ or in the more secret manifestation⁶ of his love—now then, Christians, “arise and shine.”⁷ Let it be known, that you have been on the mount with God, by the lustre of your face, the adorning of your profession, before the world.

Lord! since our looks to thee are often so slight, so cold, so distant, that no impression is made upon our hearts; do thou condescend continually to look

¹ Compare Isaiah xxxv 18. Hab. ii. 3.

² Psalm cxxxviii. 5.

³ Ibid. xc. 14.

⁴ Compare Numbers xxiii. 21. Ephesians i. 6. Col. ii. 10.

⁵ Psalm lxviii. 24.

⁶ Matt. vi. 6. John xiv. 21—23.

⁷ Isaiah lx. 1.

upon us with mercy and with power. Vouchsafe us such a look, as may bring us to ourselves, and touch us with tenderness and contrition, in the remembrance of that sin, unbelief, and disobedience, which pierced the hands, the feet, the heart of our dearest Lord and Saviour.¹

133. *Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*

To expect the favour of the Lord without an habitual desire of conformity to his image, is one among the many delusions of a self-deceiving heart. It is the peculiar character of the Christian, that his desires are as earnest for deliverance from the power as from the guilt of sin. Even could we conceive the Lord “*to look upon him*” with a sense of his favour, he would still feel himself a miserable creature, until he had received an answer to his prayer—“*Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*”

But it is often difficult to mark the power of temptation from the prevalence of sin, and thus precisely to ascertain, when “*iniquity*” may be said to “*have dominion over us.*” It is clearly, however, the influence of temptation—not as acting upon the mind, but as admitted with consent into the heart. It is this actual consent of the will, obtained by the deceitfulness and solicitations of sin, that marks its real “*dominion.*” Light, knowledge, and conscience, may open the path of holiness; but while the will—the sovereign power in the soul—dissents, the reigning power of sin continues undisputed. Much care, however, much singleness, and a most jealous scrutiny of the springs

¹ Compare Luke xxii. 61.

of action, are required, accurately to determine the bias of the will, and consequently the "*dominion of iniquity*." The perplexed conflicting soul may mistake *the rebellion* for the "*dominion of iniquity*"—its continued impression upon the heart for its ruling sway. On the other hand the unavoidable, but constrained, opposition of conviction may present some hopeful appearance of deliverance, while the dominant principle is still unshaken. The present resolution to any particular act of sin may be weakened, while the love and habit of it remains unaffected. Sin is not always hated when it is condemned, or even forsaken: nor are duties always loved in the act of their performance. The opposition to sin, which the awakened superficial professor considers as his evidence of uprightness of heart, is often only the unavailing resistance of a natural enlightened conscience to the ruling principle of the heart. The light and power of conscience may do much in condemning every known sin, and in restraining from many; in illustrating every known duty, and insisting upon the external performance of many: while yet the full "*dominion of iniquity*" is undisturbed. Were not Ahab and Judas as completely under the "*dominion of iniquity*" after their repentance as they were before?¹ Did not Balaam with all his knowledge—and the young ruler, with all his loveliness of natural character and promising semblance of sincerity—"lack that one thing"²—a heart delivered from the "*dominion of its own iniquity*"? At the same time, however, it is not occasional surprisals, resisted workings, abhorred lusts, nor immediate injections of evil and blasphemous thoughts, *but only the ascendancy of sin in the affections*; that proves its

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 27; xxii. Matt. xxvii. 3—5.

² Mark x. 21.

reigning power. The throne can admit but of one ruler; and therefore, though grace and iniquity may and do co-exist within, they cannot be co-partners in one sovereignty.

How inestimably precious is the thought, that deliverance from this cursed dominion is inseparably connected with a state of acquaintance with God! The man who enjoys the unspeakable blessing of pardoned iniquity, is he "in whose spirit there is no guile."¹ He desires to have a work done within him, as well as for him. He longs to know his Saviour as a *whole* Christ—"made of God unto him Sanctification and" complete "Redemption," as well as "Righteousness."² He comes to the cleansing fountain,³ as the double cure of his iniquity—equally effectual to wash from its power as from its guilt.

Habitual respect to the word of God is an important means of sanctification. David had been accustomed to "*hide it in his heart,*" as a preservative from sin; ⁴ and, from his own experience of this safeguard he had recommended it to the special attention of the young for "*the cleansing of their way.*"⁵ Yet the recollection of his continual forgetfulness of this rule, and of his conscious inability to observe it, leads him to turn it into a matter of prayer—"Order my steps in thy word." And indeed, if we are living very close to God, (much closer than the generality of Christians are content to live) we shall be most fearful of walking alone. We shall desire to have every step, "*ordered*" for us in our Father's word, that we may avoid the devious paths, which present themselves on either side, beset with imperceptible danger and spread with the fowler's snare. And what a blessed path

¹ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

² 1 Cor. i. 30.

³ Zech. xiii. 1.

⁴ Verse 11.

⁵ Verse 9.

would this be for us, if we had singleness and simplicity always to "look right on, and strait before us!"¹ But alas! we are often only half roused from our security. The word is forgotten; or there is an unreadiness to receive its Divine impressions. Our own wisdom is consulted: and, "or ever we are aware," "*iniquity*" regains a temporary "*dominion over us.*"

Now I would ask myself—What do I know of such a walk as this? Am I frequently during the day looking upward to my heavenly guide; and then looking into his word as my direction in the way: and lastly, considering my heart and conduct, whether it is "*ordered in the word?*" Let me remember, that it is only the man who has "the law of God in his heart," that possesses the security, that "none of his steps shall slide."² When I take therefore a step into the world, let me ask—Is it "*ordered in God's word,*" which exhibits Christ as my perfect example; so that, walking after him, and following in his steps, I may be able to frame my temper and habits according to this unsullied pattern?

But let us mark the special promise of the Gospel as the warrant of this prayer "*Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*"³ The law stirred up sin, and gave it increased power; while it left us to our unassisted exertions to subdue it. We watch, pray, and strive against it; yet alas! it mocks our efforts, rages, yea, tyrannizes more than ever.⁴ But it is that cross, that gave the child of God his first right view of sin, that first made him loathe it, that first enabled him to contemplate a holy God without fear, and even with confidence — this — this alone subdues his pride,

¹ Proverbs iv. 25.

² Psalm xxxvii. 31.

³ Romans vi. 14.

⁴ Rom. vii. 8. 1 Cor. xv. 16.

rebellion, enmity, selfishness. In him that hung there, we trust as an Almighty conqueror; and we are made ourselves "more than conquerors through him that loved us."¹ His very name of Jesus² marks his office, his crown, his glory. Here therefore—not in doubts and fears—not in indolent mourning for sin—here lies the appointed means of present relief—the only hope of final victory. "*Iniquity*," even when subdued, will struggle to the last for "*dominion*:" but looking to and living on Jesus, we have the victory still. The more clear our view of Jesus, the more complete is our victory. Supplies of continual strength will ever be vouchsafed to restrain the "*dominion of iniquity*," and even to "keep under" its daily risings; except as they may be needful for the exercises of our graces, and be eventually overruled for the glory and praise of our faithful God.

134. *'Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.*

"MANY are the afflictions of the righteous"³—not only from the "*iniquity*" of the heart, but "*from the oppression of man.*" Yet man is only the Lord's hand and sword."⁴ He cannot move of himself; and he will only be permitted to move under the overruling guidance of our Father's wisdom and love. Not indeed that the believer would (at least irrespective of submission to the will of God)⁵ desire his "*deliverance*" from this trouble on account of personal pain and distress; but that

¹ Romans viii. 37.

³ Psalm xxxiv. 19.

⁵ See the example of David, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26; and of David's Lord, Luke xxii. 42.

² Matthew i. 21.

⁴ Psalm xvii. 13, 14.

he sometimes finds peculiar circumstances of trial an unavoidable hindrance in the service of his God. And his conviction sends him to the throne of grace: and there he never makes interest in vain. "*He cries unto the Lord because of the oppressors: and he sends a Saviour, and a great one: and he delivers him.*"¹

The power of faith is indeed Omnipotent. Mountains are removed from their place, or they become "plains before"² it; "or the worm" is enabled to "thresh them, and beat them small, and make them as chaff."³ Often is the Christian strengthened to overcome the most formidable opposition, and to "profess a good profession before many witnesses,"⁴ who are "watching" and wishing for his halting."⁵ The grace of Christ will make the hardest duty easy: and the love of Christ will make the sharpest trials sweet: yet, where in the continued exercise of faith the obstacles to conscientious obedience remain unmoved, we may lawfully pray that the providence of God would open some plainer and more encouraging path for the observance of his precepts—"Deliver me from the oppression of man; so will I keep thy precepts."

To illustrate this—a child of God, bound in the fetters of a worldly family, and restrained by an authority, to which deference is justly due, from a free and unreserved obedience to the Lord, might send up this prayer with assured acceptance. A time of "*deliverance from the oppression of man,*" as well as a time of persecution from his enmity, has sometimes proved a season of extraordinary prosperity in the church of God. It was, when "*the Churches had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria,*"

¹ Isaiah xix. 20.

² Matthew xxi. 21, 22. Zech. iv. 7.

³ Isaiah xli. 14, 15.

⁴ 1 Timothy vi. 12.

⁵ Jer. xx. 10.

that they “*were edified*, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they *were multiplied*.”¹ And thus in individual experience, whatever be the benefit of persecution, yet the weariness of a long protracted conflict is often more than flesh and blood can bear; and which he who “*knoweth our frame*,”² will not refuse to look upon, and remove in answer to the prayers of his afflicted people. At the same time, our proneness to self-indulgence, and our natural inclination to shrink from the appointed cross, require this prayer to be presented with exceeding caution and self-jealousy. There is great danger, lest, in our eagerness to escape from the difficulties of our path, we should lose the important benefit intended by them. We must therefore accompany the petition for deliverance with a sincere and upright purpose to “*keep God’s precepts*.” For how many have exposed the unsoundness of their own hearts, when the supplication has been heard, and the deliverance granted, *and the promise of obedience been forgotten!*

Fellow-Christian! have your circumstances of trial ever dictated such a prayer? How then have you improved your liberty, when the answer has been vouchsafed! Has the way of escape “*made*” for you been kept in grateful remembrance? Has the effect of your “*deliverance*” been visible in an increasing love and devotedness to the Lord’s service? Oh! let a special Ebenezer be set up to mark this special achievement of prayer.³ Let the mercy vouchsafed be connected with the sympathy of our “*faithful and merciful High-Priest*, who, being himself touched with the feeling of your infirmities,” has pleaded for

¹ Acts ix. 31.² Psalm ciii. 14.³ 1 Samuel vii. 12.

your succour and release.¹ And be encouraged henceforth to tread the ways of God with more firmness and sensible stay, “having your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.”² But remember—the blessing of the cross is lost, if it does not issue in a song of praise—if we have not been able to take it up as a token of fatherly love. At all times the safest and shortest way to peace, is to be made willing that God should use his own methods with us; to live the present moment to him in the situation in which he has placed us; not dreaming of other circumstances more favourable to our spiritual prosperity; but leaving ourselves, our difficulties, our discouragements, in his hands, who makes no mistakes in any of his dispensations with his people—but who orders them all that they may “turn to their salvation through their prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”³

135. *Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.*

IF the Lord “*deliver us from the oppression of man,*” and “*make even our enemies to be at peace with us;*”⁴ still, if we are in spiritual health, we shall be restless and uneasy, until he “*make his face to shine upon us.*” And in the Scripture revelation of God—“*dwelling between the cherubims,*”⁵ and therefore on the mercy-seat⁶—with the “*rainbow,*” the emblem of “*the covenant of peace,*” “*round about the throne,*”⁷ as if to invite the access of sinners, from every quarter—have we not full

¹ Hebrews iv. 15; ii. 18.

³ Philippians i. 19.

⁵ 2 Kings xix. 15. Psalm xcix. 1. Ezekiel x. 1—5.

⁶ Exod. xxv. 17—22, with Rom. iii. 25.

² Eph. vi. 15.

⁴ Prov. xvi. 7.

⁷ Rev. iv. 3.

warrant to expect the desired blessing? Are we not emboldened to plead—“*Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth; stir up thy strength, and come and save us? Turn us again, O God; and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.*”¹ Others we see eagerly asking for one worldly object and another—“Who will shew us any good?” Alas! they will discover in the end, that they have “spent their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.”² The believer’s incessant cry is—Let me see “the King’s face.” This is a blessing worth praying for. It is his heart’s desire, his present privilege, and what is infinitely better, his sure everlasting prospect—“*They shall see his face.*”³

It is both important and interesting to mark the repetitions in this beautiful Psalm. David had just before prayed—“*Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me.*”⁴ Here again he offers up, with some slight variation the same prayer—“*Make thy face to shine upon thy servant.*” Such cries in the mouth of this holy servant of God, must have been most hopeless petitions—nay, the expression of the most daring presumption; had he not been acquainted with the only true way of access to God, joyfully led to renounce every other way, and enabled diligently to improve this acceptable approach to his God. Indeed whatever obscurity may hang over the question relating to the faith of the Old Testament believers; their confidence at the throne of grace shews them to have attained a far more distinct perception of Christian privilege, through the shadowy representations of their law, than is commonly imagined. Else how could they have been so wrestling and persevering in their

¹ Psalm lxxx. 1—3.

² Revelation xxii. 4.

³ Isaiah lv. 2, with Psalm ix. 6.

⁴ Verse 132.

petitions—so successful in overcoming the spirit of bondage, and in breathing out the spirit of adoption in the expression of their wants and desires before the Lord? The prayers of the Old Testament church are not more distinguished for their simplicity, spirituality, and earnestness, than for their unfettered, evangelical confidence. When they approached the footstool of the Divine Majesty, with the supplications—“*Make thy face to shine upon thy servant*”—“*Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth*”—it was as if they had pleaded—“*Reconciled Father, thou that sittest upon a throne of grace—look upon us!—Abba, Father, be gracious to us!*”

Many, however, seem to despise this child-like confidence. They go on in heartless complaining and uncertain apprehensions of their state; as if *doubting* was their life, and as if they might rest upon the presumption, that the “*shining of God’s face upon them*” is not indispensable to their salvation. But will they then be content to “be saved, yet so as by fire,” instead of having “an entrance ministered unto them *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour?”¹ Is it enough for them to be *just alive*, when “the things that remain,” from want of being duly cherished, “are ready to die?” If they can be safe without a conscious interest in the favour of God, can they be so without the desire for it? Is not this assurance attainable? Is it not commanded?² Is it not most desirable? And thus they bring a cloud upon the integrity of their profession. For we may receive this as an undoubted truth, that God’s real people are living habitually either in a state of spiritual enjoyment, or of restless dissatisfaction. Their dark seasons are

¹ Compare 1 Cor. iii. 15. 2 Peter i. 11.

² See 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Heb. vi. 11. 2 Peter i. 10.

times of wrestling supplication¹—seasons of deep humiliation,² tenderness of spirit,³ and constant waiting upon God,⁴ until he “*makes his face to shine upon his servants.*” And thus they exhibit the secret influence of the principle of assurance, even when there is no sensible enjoyment of this most important blessing.

But how—it may be asked—is this happy state of sun-shine to be realized? Its chief hindrances (apart from the indulgence of sin, or a course of secret backsliding from God) are found in mistaken or contracted views of the Gospel. The chief means of attainment, therefore, will be included in enlarged apprehensions of the Gospel of the grace of God—of its fulness, satisfying every claim, and supplying every want—of its freeness, unencumbered with conditions, and holding forth encouragement to the most unworthy—and of its security, affording permanent rest in the foundations of the covenant of grace. Thus will the life of faith be maintained in constant exercise. Each successive day will be marked by some fresh contemplation of Jesus, and some renewed reliance upon him, and thus walking in closer communion with him, our hope will be enlivened with the constant sense of reconciliation and love.

We need not wonder at the persevering determination, with which the Psalmist was led to seek “*the shining of the Lord’s face*” upon him. This high privilege is connected no less with the Christian’s public usefulness than with his personal enjoyment. For who is he, that is most likely to win others to the love of the Saviour, and to the service of God—to enliven the drooping soul, or to recover the backslider?

¹ Psalm lxxxviii. 1—3; cxxx. 1, 2.

² Lam. iii. 20—22. Micah vii. 9.

³ Lam. iii. 31—40.

⁴ Psalm xl. 1—3; cxxx. 5, 6. Isaiah viii. 17; l. 10.

Is it not he, who lives most in the sun-shine of the Gospel, and who therefore has most to tell of its heavenly enjoyments. But you say, ‘ My heart, alas ! is so cold and barren, my affections so languid, my desires so faint, my sky so often clouded. I do not forget *that I am a child ; but a child in disgrace* is too often my dishonourable character and wretched condition.’ Then exercise your faith in going where David was wont to go—As a penitent child, “ arise, and go to your Father ”—“ acknowledge your iniquity ”¹—tell your complaint before him—resort much and often to him ; be importunate ; be patient ; plead the name² and merits of Jesus ; and you will not, you cannot, plead in vain ; you will once more regain the comfort of your assurance, and walk happily, holily as well as confidently, in the light of your Father’s countenance.

Yet the further you advance in the enjoyment of the blessed ways of God, the more you will learn of your own ignorance, and of the darkness of all mere human teaching. To the end, therefore, your prayer will be—“ *Teach me thy statutes :* ” and he that taught you this petition, will himself, according to his promise, be your teacher in the way of holiness ;—“ I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes : and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”³ And if, under his teaching, in the path-way to glory—our God “ *makes his face to shine upon his servant,* ” what more does he want to beguile the toil and weariness of the way ? And if one beam of his countenance, though but dimly seen through this sinful medium, exceeds the glories of ten thousand worlds—what will it be to live under the perpetual cloudless “ *shining of his face !* ”

¹ Jer. iii. 13.² John xiv. 13, 14.³ Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

Believer! does not this prospect invigorate every step of your journey? Your Lord is at hand. Soon will he appear to gladden with his inexpressible smile every soul that is in readiness for him. Oh! seek to realize his approach, and with holy aspirations and joyful expectancy respond to his welcome voice—"He which testifieth these things saith—Surely I come quickly; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."¹

136. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they kept not thy law.*

If the Lord *teaches us* the privilege of his *statutes*, he will teach us compassion for those, who *keep them not*. This was the mind of Jesus. His life exhibited one, whose 'heart was made of tenderness.' And there were some occasions, when the display of his compassion was peculiarly striking. At the closing period of his life, it is recorded, that "when he was come near, and beheld the city"—"beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth"²—but now given up to its own ways, and "wrath coming upon it to the uttermost," he "wept over it."³ It was then a moment of triumph. The air was rent with hosannahs. The road was strewed with branches from the trees, and all was joy and praise.⁴ Amid all this exultation, the Saviour alone seemed to have no voice for the triumph—no heart for joy. His omniscient mind embraced all the *spiritual* desolation of this sad case; and he could only shew compassionate weeping in the midst of a solemn triumph. "*Rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because they kept not his law.*"

¹ Revelation xxii. 20.

² Psalm xlvi. 2.

³ Luke xix. 41. Compare Matthew xxiii. 37.

⁴ Compare Luke xix. 36—40.

Now a Christian in this as in every other feature of character will be conformed to the image of his Lord. His heart will therefore be touched with a tender concern for the honour of his God, and a pitying concern for those wretched sinners, that “*keep not his law,*” and are perishing in their own transgressions. Thus from the beginning—was “*just Lot*” in Sodom “*vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.*”¹ Thus did Moses, as he tells his faithless people, “*fall down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water, because of all their sins which they had sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger.*”² Thus also Samuel, in the anticipation of the Lord’s judgments upon Saul, “*grieved himself and cried unto the Lord all night.*”³ Ezra, on a similar occasion in the deepest prostration of sorrow, “*rent his garment and his mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard, and sat down astonished until the evening sacrifice.*”⁴ Jeremiah in the same spirit gives vent to his passionate vehemence of concern—“*Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*”⁵ Paul also had the witness of his conscience of “*great heaviness and continued sorrow in his heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.*”⁶ In reproving transgressors, he could write to them in no other way than “*out of much affliction and anguish of heart with many tears;*”⁷ and in speaking of them to others, with the same

¹ 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.² Deut. ix. 18, 19.³ 1 Samuel xv. 11.⁴ Ezra ix. 3, 4.⁵ Jeremiah ix. 1. Compare xiii. 17; xiv. 17.⁶ Romans ix. 1—3.⁷ 2^d Cor. ii. 4.

tenderness of spirit, he adds—“ *Of whom I tell you even weeping.*”¹ And, if David at this time was suffering “ *from the oppression of man,*” yet his own injuries never drew from him such expressions of overwhelming sorrow, as the sight of the awful violation of the law of his God.

Thus uniformly is the character of God’s people represented—not merely as those that are *free from*, but as “ *those that sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst of the land.*”² And what a large sphere still presents itself on every side for the unrestrained exercise of Christian compassion! The appalling spectacle of a world apostatized from God, of multitudes sporting with everlasting destruction—as if the God of heaven were “ *a man that he should lie,*”³ is surely enough to force “ *rivers of waters*” from the hearts of those that are concerned for his honour. What a man of sin ascends as a cloud before the Lord, from a single heart! Add the aggregate of a village—a town—a country—a world! every day—every hour—every moment—well might the “ *rivers of waters*” rise to an overflowing tide, ready to burst its barriers. Could we witness a house on fire, without speedy and practical evidence of our compassion for the inhabitants? And yet, alas! how often do we witness souls on the brink of destruction—unconscious of danger, or bidding defiance to it—with comparative indifference? How are we Christians, if we believe not the Scripture warnings of their danger? or if, believing them, we do not bestir ourselves to their help? What hypocrisy is it to pray for their conversion, while we are making no effort to promote it! Oh! let it be our daily supplication,

¹ Phil. iii. 18. Compare Acts xx. 19.

² Ezekiel ix. 4.

³ Numbers xxiii. 19.

that this indifference concerning their everlasting state may give place to a spirit of weeping, tenderness, and compassion; that we may not be living, as if this world were really, what it appears to be, a world without souls; that we may never see the sabbaths of God profaned, his laws trampled under foot, the ungodly “breaking their bands asunder, and casting away their cords from them,”¹ without a more determined resolution ourselves to keep these laws of our God, and to plead for their honour with these obstinate transgressors. Have we no near and dear relatives, yet “lying in wickedness—dead in trespasses and sins?” To what blessed family, reader, do you belong, where there are no such objects of pity? But be it so—it is well. Yet are you silent? Have you no ungodly ignorant neighbours around you? And are they unwarned as well as unconverted? Do we visit them in the way of courtesy or kindness, yet give them no word of affectionate entreaty on the concerns of eternity? Let our families indeed possess, as they ought to possess, the first claim to our compassionate regard. Then let our parishes, our neighbourhood, our country, the world, find a place in our affectionate, prayerful, and earnest consideration.

Nor let it be supposed, that the doctrine of sovereign and effectual grace has any tendency to paralyze exertion. So far from it, the most powerful supports to Christian perseverance are derived from this source. The palpable and awful proofs meeting him on every side—of the “enmity of the carnal mind against God”—of its rooted indisposition either to submit to his law or to embrace his Gospel—threaten to sink the Christian labourer in despondency. And nothing

¹ Psalm ii. 3.

sustains him in his exercised course, but the assurance of the power of God to remove the resisting medium, and of his purpose to accomplish the subjugation of natural corruption in a countless multitude of his redeemed people.

It is this spirit of compassionate interest, that forms the life, the pulse, and the strength of Missionary exertion, and has ever distinguished those honoured servants of God, who have devoted their time, their health, their talents, their all, to the blessed work of "saving souls from death, and covering a multitude of sins."¹ Can we conceive of a Missionary living in the spirit of his work—surrounded with thousands of mad idolaters, hearing their shouts, and witnessing their abominations, without at least a weeping spirit? Indignant grief for the dishonour done to God—amazement at this affecting spectacle of human blindness—detestation of human impiety—compassionate yearnings over human wretchedness and ruin—all combine to force tears of the deepest sorrow from an heart enlightened and constrained by the influence of a Saviour's love,² This, as we have seen, was our Master's spirit. And let none presume themselves to be Christians, if they are destitute of "this mind that was in Christ Jesus;"³ if they know nothing of His melting compassion for a lost world, or of his burning zeal for his heavenly Father's glory.

¹ James v. 20.

² ' My God! I feel the mournful scene;
My bowels yearn o'er dying men;
And fain my pity would reclaim,
And snatch the fire-brands from the flame.
But feeble my compassion proves,
And can but weep where most it loves:
Thine own all-saving arm employ,
And turn these drops of grief to joy.'

³ See Phil. ii. 4—8.

Oh! for that deep realizing sense of the preciousness of immortal souls, that would make us willing to endure suffering, reproach, and loss of all, so that we might win one soul to God—raise one monument to his everlasting praise! Happy mourner in Zion! whose tears over the guilt and wretchedness of a perishing world are the outward indications of your secret pleadings with God, and the effusions of hearts solemnly dedicated to the service of your fellow-sinners!

PART XVIII.

137. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.*—138. *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded, are righteous, and very faithful.*

As the believer advances in the knowledge of the Gospel, he is led to adoring contemplation of the awful perfections of his God: he is able to justify his "ways," even when they "are in the sea and in the great waters,"¹ and to acknowledge the righteousness of his character, his government, and his testimonies. He is now made to see, that, though "clouds and darkness are round about him," yet "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."² This is the uniform acknowledgment of the Lord's people even while they "see" but "as through a glass darkly," and "know" but "in part." "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."³ And the same acknowledgment will be made with perfect love and infinite humility, when in a world of unclouded day they shall "see face to face," and "know, even as also they are known"⁴—"and they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb—Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! *just and true are thy ways*, thou King of saints."⁵ The unvarying testimony of the Lord's people to the righteous character of his afflictive dispensations had before

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 19. ² Psalm xcvi. 2. ³ Psalm cxlv. 17.

⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

⁵ Rev. xv. 3.

been embodied in the confession—“*I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*”¹ Testimonies to this unsullied and exalted character of God have been extorted even from his enemies. Haughty Pharaoh was constrained to bow—“*The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.*” Adonibezek, under “the blow of his hand,”—cried out—“*As I have done, so God hath requited me.*”³

The young Christian is however less able to connect these attributes of God with daily experience, and exercises himself for the most part in the more engaging perfections of his long-suffering, his goodness, or his love. It may be therefore often considered a satisfactory evidence of growth in grace, when our habitual contemplation of God fixes upon our minds the more deep and awful displays of his character; and we gather from thence an increase of light, and peace, humility and consolation. But it is the cross of Calvary, that harmonizes to our view the Divine attributes, at once the most appalling and the most encouraging. Though his own declaration—that “he will by no means clear the guilty”⁴—seemed to present an insurmountable barrier to the purpose of mercy; yet, rather than the glory of a God of love should be obscured, or his righteous law should be mitigated, “he spared not his own Son”⁵—he “made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.”⁶

And do not his “*testimonies*” express a true and lively image of himself? Do we not see that they “*are righteous and very faithful*” even as himself? When they require perfect love to God and man,⁷ do they require more than our “reasonable service”—more than it is our duty and privilege to render him? When we

¹ Verse 75.² Exodus ix. 27.³ Judges i. 7.⁴ Exodus xxxiv. 7.⁵ Romans viii. 32.⁶ 2 Cor. v. 21.⁷ Matthew xxii. 37, 39.

have been blessed with a spiritual apprehension of their nature, and are conformed and framed to them; none among us will hesitate in setting their seal to the inscription—“*The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good!*”¹

But let us take care to exhibit the practical influence of our contemplations of the character and government of God. The unconverted—far from understanding or subscribing to their acknowledgment—complain—“*The ways of the Lord are not equal. My punishment is greater than I can bear.*”² And so opposed are the “*righteous judgments of God*” to the perverseness of corrupt nature, that even with the child of God there is much murmuring within, that needs to be stilled—much repining to be hushed—much impatience to be repressed—many hard thoughts to be lamented, resisted, and banished. We are too apt to forget, at these clouded seasons, how clearly our own experience illustrates this point—“to shew that the Lord is upright; he is our rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”³ In returning then “and rest shall we be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be our strength.”⁴ In the submissive acknowledgment of the Lord’s dispensations “our peace” will flow “as a river;”⁵ more deep and extensive as it approaches the ocean, and fertilizing our souls with an abundant harvest of spiritual peace and enjoyment.

¹ Psalm xix. 9. Rom. vii. 12.

² Ezek. xviii. 25. Gen. iv. 13.

³ Psalm xcii. 15.

⁴ Isaiah xxx. 15.

⁵ Isaiah xlvi. 18.

139. *My zeal hath consumed me; because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

DAVID'S high estimation of the "*testimonies*" of God naturally overwhelmed him with vehement sorrow to see them neglected and despised. He could bear that "his enemies" should *forget him*; but this "*zeal*" could not endure that they should "*forget the words of his God.*" Zeal is a quality or passion of the human mind, whose real character must be determined by the objects on which it is employed, and the principle by which it is directed. There is a true and a false zeal, differing as widely from each other as an heavenly flame from the infernal fire. The one is fervent disinterested affection, expanding the heart, and delighting to unite with the whole empire of God in the pursuit of a good, which all may enjoy without envious rivalry. The other is a selfish, interested principle, contracting the heart, and ready to sacrifice the good of mankind, and even the glory of God, to its own individual advantage. Were the power of this latter principle proportioned to its native tendency, or were it to operate extensively in an associated body; it would end in detaching its several members each from their proper centre; in disuniting them from each other; and, as far as its influence could reach, crumbling the moral system into discordant atoms. How much, alas! of this baneful principle passes for zeal in the Church, which is exemplified chiefly in an obstinate opposition to "the truth as it is in Jesus"—arming itself with the weapons of open persecution, or for the milder warfare of reproach and calumny! "This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual,

devilish.”¹ How much also of that misguided heat, that spends itself upon the externals of religion, or would “call fire down from heaven” in defence of fundamental truths, may be found among us, exposing its blind devotees to our Master’s tender rebuke—“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of!”²

Often also do we see a distempered counterfeit zeal, disproportioned in its exercise, wasting its strength upon the subordinate parts of the system, and comparatively feeble in its maintenance of the vital doctrines of Christ. Thus it disunites the Church by adherence to points of difference, instead of compacting the Church together by strengthening the more important points of agreement. Often again, by the same process in practical religion, are the “mint, anise, and cummin” vehemently contended for; while the “weightier matters of the law”³ are little regarded.

Of a widely different character from this fervour of selfishness is that genuine Christian zeal, which has ever formed a distinguishing feature of the disciple of our Lord. Enlightened by the word of God, and quickened into operation by the love of Christ, it both shines and warms at the same moment. It is indeed the fire of heavenly love kindled into a flame, exciting the most tender desires and constant efforts for the best interests of every child of man, so far as its sphere can reach; and bounded only by a consistent regard to the general welfare of the whole. Thus earnest and compassionate in its influence; awakened to a sense of the preciousness of immortal souls, and the overwhelming importance of eternity, it is never at a loss to discover an extended sphere for its most vehement and constraining exercises. While it hates the sins that pass on every side before

¹ James iii. 15.

² Luke ix. 54, 55.

³ Matt. xxiii. 23.

its view, it is all gentleness to the sinner; and would gladly endeavour to weep tears of blood over those who are deaf to the voice of persuasion, if such tears could have any power to turn them from their iniquity. But, knowing all human unassisted efforts to be insufficient, it exhibits itself to the world in protesting against the abominations which it is too feeble to prevent; and then hastens to the secret chamber to pour out its wrestling desires in the tenderness of our Master's intercession—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹

Such was the zeal of the Ancient Lawgiver, whose spirit (though as it regarded his own cause "*meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth,*"²) "*waved hot*"³ on witnessing the grievous dishonour done to his God during his absence on the mount. At the same time, (as if more clearly to distinguish the burning of holy zeal from the natural heat of an unrenewed spirit) we mark his self-devotion for his people in secret pleading in their cause; as he had manifested his boldness and concern for the honour of his God before the congregation of the Lord.⁴ Surely he could have taken up this language—"My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words." Burning with the same holy flame, we find the great Old Testament Reformer bearing his testimony against the universal prevalence of idolatry; and making use of the arm of temporal power,⁵ and of the yet greater power of secret complaint,⁶ to stem the torrent of iniquity. The same impulse in later times marked the conduct of the Apostles; when, rending their clothes and run-

¹ Luke xxiii. 34.

³ Exod. xxxii. 19.

⁵ 1 Kings xviii. 17—40.

² Numbers xii. 3.

⁴ Exodus xxxii. 30—32.

⁶ 1 Kings xix. 10.

ning in among” a frantic multitude of idolaters, by all the power of their entreaties “*they were scarcely able to restrain the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.*”¹ On another occasion the great Apostle, forgetting “the goodly stones and buildings” that met his eye at Athens—found “*his spirit stirred up in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*”²

But, “compassed about, as we are, with so great a cloud of witnesses”³ to the influence of this heavenly principle, let us yet turn aside to look unto One greater than them all—to One, whose example in every temper of Christian conduct affords equal direction and encouragement. Jesus could testify to his Father by the mouth of the Psalmist—“*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*”⁴ He was ever ready to put aside even lawful engagements and obligations, when they interfered with this paramount demand—“*Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?*”⁵ And if we really bear the stamp of disciples of Jesus—while we shall bear to have our “names cast out as evil,”⁶ and even “rejoice that we are counted worthy”⁷ of this shame—we shall at the same time be tender of any reflection on the name of our God, as of our dearest friend and benefactor. We shall feel any slight of his honour as sensitively as a wound to our own reputation; nor shall we hesitate to thrust ourselves between, to receive on ourselves any strokes that may be aimed at his cause. This combined spirit of self-denial and self-devotedness kindles the flame, which “many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown.”⁸ ‘*I could bear,*’ said holy Brainerd,

¹ Acts xiv. 13—18.

² Acts xvii. 16.

³ Heb. xii. 1.

⁴ Psalm lxix. 9, with John ii. 17. Isaiah lix. 17.

⁵ Luke ii. 49.

⁶ Luke vi. 22.

⁷ Acts v. 41.

⁸ Canticles viii. 7.

*'any desertion or spiritual conflict; if I could but have my heart burning all the while within me with love to God, and desires for his glory.'*¹ It is indeed a delightful exercise, to "spend and be spent" in the service of him, who for our sakes was even consumed by the fire of his own zeal—"I have a baptism"—said he, "to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"²

However, the most satisfactory evidence of Christian zeal—is—when it begins at home—in a narrow scrutiny, and vehement "revenge" against the sins of our own hearts.³ Do we mourn *over our own forgetfulness of God's words*? Are we zealous to redeem the loss to our Saviour's cause from this sinful neglect? And are we making it plain that our opposition to sin in the ungodly is the opposition of love? And is this love manifested to the persons and souls of those, whose doctrines and practice we are constrained to resist—and in a carefulness to refrain from the use of unhallowed "carnal weapons" in this spiritual "warfare?"⁴

Perhaps the weak timid child of God may be saying, 'I can do nothing for my God. I suffer his law to be forgotten, with little or no success in my endeavour to prevent it.' But do you not love his cause? Is not his honour dear to you as your own? Then take courage, and let your secret chambers witness to your zeal, and the Lord "will not be unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love."⁵ He will even strengthen you for the conflict which you so much dread—the open confession of his cause—"For he hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound

¹ Brainerd's Diary. Edwards' Works, iii. 107.

² Luke xii. 50.

³ Com. 2 Cor. vii. 11. Rev. iii. 19.

⁴ See 2 Cor. x. 4. James i. 20.

⁵ Hebrews vi. 10.

the things that are mighty."¹ Or—should peculiar trials restrain the boldness of your profession, you may be found in the end to have made as effectual resistance to the progress of sin, by your intercession before God, as those who have been enabled to manifest a more open front in the face of the world.

140. *Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it.*

THE love which David here expresses for the law of his God, may account for the "zeal" he felt for that neglect of it, which he witnessed in the world. All other systems of religion, (or rather of "philosophy falsely so called") allure their disciples by the indulgence of carnal desires or self-complacent pride. The word of God outweighs them all in its chief excellence—peculiar to itself—its purity. It "is *very pure*—tried to the uttermost" in the furnace, and found to be absolutely without dross.² Its promises are without a shadow of change or unfaithfulness. Its precepts reflect the holy image of their Divine Author. In a word, it contains 'truth without any mixture of error for its matter'³—"Therefore thy servant loveth it."

'No one but a true servant of God can *therefore love it*, because it is *pure*; since he who loves it must desire to be like it, to feel its efficacy, to be reformed by it, and conformed to it.'⁴ The unlettered believer cannot well discern its *sublimity*; but he loves it for its *holiness*. The scholar on the other hand *admires its sublimity*—for the *secrets* which it reveals (such

¹ 1 Corinthians i. 27.

² Prayer Book translation. Comp. Psalm xii. 6.

³ Locke.

⁴ Bishop Horne *in loco*.

as the pride of the natural heart struggles to conceal) forbid him to love it.¹ From the glass which shows his neglected obligations, his self-deluded state, and his appalling prospects, he turns away in disgust. The indulgence of sin effectually precludes the benefit of the most industrious search into the word of God. The heart must undergo an entire renewal—it must be sanctified and cleansed, yea, be “baptized with the Holy Ghost,”² before it can discern, or—when it has discerned—can love, the purity of the word of God.

Witness the ardent breathings of Brainerd’s soul, as illustrative of this view of the blessed word—*‘Oh that my soul were holy, as he is holy! Oh that it were pure even as Christ is pure; and perfect, as my Father in heaven is perfect! These I feel are the sweetest commands in God’s book, comprising all others.’*³ *‘Oh how refreshing’*—exclaims the beloved Martyn—*‘and supporting to my soul was the holiness of the word of God! Sweeter than the sweetest promise at this time, was the constant and manifest tendency of the word, to lead men to holiness and the deepest seriousness.’*⁴

This property of the word of God is connected with the nourishment afforded by it. As the support of “milk to the new born babe,” it is to be daily “desired, that we may grow thereby”⁵—grow in purity of heart and conduct; learning to shrink from the touch of sin; “cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”⁶ Our appetite for this word—*“esteeming it more than our necessary food”*⁷—will be

¹ See John iii. 20.

² Matt. iii. 11.

³ Edwards’ Works, iii. 171.

⁴ Martyn’s Life, pp. 206, 207.

⁵ 1 Peter ii. 2.

⁶ 2 Corinthians vii 1.

⁷ Job xxiii. 12.

in proportion to our growth in grace, and an evidence of this growth, and a constant spring of holy enjoyment.

An additional excitement to love the purity of the book of God is the exhibition of that purity embodied and illustrated in our perfect pattern—even in Him, “*who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.*”¹ For the habit of beholding the Saviour with the eye of faith in the glass of the word conforms the heart to his image.² But be it ever remembered that the holiness of the word can have no fellowship, and communicate no life, except in its own atmosphere. Oh! for a larger influence of the Spirit of God upon our souls, that we may enjoy the purifying delights of the word of God; that we may live in it, live by it, to the glory of our dear Redeemer’s name, and to the edification of his Church!

141. *I am small and despised; yet do not I forget thy precepts.*

“*Small and despised*” was the character of David’s condition, when the Lord first looked on him.³ It was also his own estimate of himself in the height of his glory, and the reproach, which he often endured for the name of his God.⁴ “*Yet did he not forget his precepts.*” The remembrance of his God, was a cheering encouragement to his faith in his lowly condition; ⁵ and no less his stay and support in the far greater trials of his prosperity. Thus habitually does he seem to have realized the unspeakable privilege of an ever-present God!

The objects of the Lord’s sovereign choice⁶ whom he has stamped as a “peculiar treasure unto him above

¹ Hebrews vii. 26.

³ 1 Samuel xvi. 11.

⁵ 1 Samuel xvii. 34—26.

² Compare 2 Cor. iii. 18.

⁴ 2 Samuel vi. 20.

⁶ Exodus xix. 5.

all people," and whom at the day of his appearing he will bring forth as the "jewels"¹ of his crown—are most frequently in their worldly condition²—always in the eyes of the world,³ and in their own estimation,⁴—"*small and despised.*" Nor are they backward to appropriate to themselves this character, and to accept the portion entailed upon it; and yet pride and hypocrisy in the natural heart will sometimes assume it for selfish ends. Even this language of humility—which, when used in sincerity, is exclusively the result of divine teaching—is not unfrequently in the mouth of the professor, to enable him to maintain "a name to live" in the church of God. But are those, who call themselves "*small and despised,*" willing to be taken at their word? Are they content to be despised by those, whose esteem this "voluntary" spurious "humility" was meant to secure? When they take "the lowest place," do they feel it to be *their own place*? Or does not the language of self-abasement mean in the eyes of God—'*Come, see how humble I am!*'⁵

¹ Malachi iii. 17.

² 1 Cor. i. 27—29. James ii. 5.¹

³ 1 Cor. iv. 9—13.

⁴ Psalm xl. 17. 1 Cor. xv. 9. Eph. iii. 8.

⁵ 'Many hypocrites make great pretences to humility as well as other graces. But they cannot find out what a humble speech and behaviour is, or how to speak and act, so that there may be indeed a savour of Christian humility in what they say or do. That sweet humble air and mein is beyond their art, being not "led by the Spirit," or naturally guided to a behaviour becoming holy humility by the vigour of a lowly spirit within them. And therefore they have no other way, but to be much in declaring that they are humble, and telling how they were humbled to the dust at such and such times, and abounding in very bad expressions about themselves,—such as—'I have a dreadful wicked heart.'—'Oh! this cursed heart of mine,' &c. Such expressions are very often used—not with a heart broken—not with the tears of Her that "washed Jesus's feet with her tears,"—not as "remembering and being confounded, and never opening their mouth because of their shame when God is pacified," (Ezek. xvi. 63) but with a light air, or with pharisaical affectation.'—*Edwards on Affections*. Part iii. sect. vi.

Christian! think not these self-inquiries unnecessary for the cautious scrutiny of thine own heart. A self-annihilating spirit *before men*, as well as before God—to feel “*small and despised*,” when we have a reputable name in the Church—is a rare attainment—a glorious triumph of victorious grace—usually the fruit of a sharp affliction. This was the spirit of Brainerd—that meek and lowly disciple of his Master, who would express his astonishment, that any one above the rank of “the beasts that perish” could condescend to notice him.¹ If we are *small and despised* in the estimation of men, let us think of “Him whom man despiseth—Him whom the nation abhorreth.”² Never was such an instance of magnanimity displayed, as when Pilate brought out the blessed Jesus, arrayed in the mockery of royalty, and with the blood streaming from the temples, and said, “Behold the man!”³ Thus was there a human being, sustaining himself in the simple exclusive consciousness of the favour of God, against the universal scorn of every face. This was independence—this was greatness indeed. With such a pattern before our eyes, and such a motive touching our hearts, we may well account it “a *very small thing* that we should be judged of man’s judgment.”⁴ What upheld Jesus *as man*, will uphold his servants also. “He committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”⁵ Must we

¹ ‘God feeds me with crumbs. Blessed be his name for anything; I felt a great desire, that all God’s people should know how mean, and little, and vile I am, that they might see I am nothing, that so they might pray for me aright, and not have the least dependence upon me. I could not bear to think of Christians shewing me any respect. I saw myself exceedingly vile and unworthy; so that I was ashamed that any one should bestow any favour upon me, or shew me any respect.’—*Brainerd’s Diary*.

² Isaiah xlix. 7. Compare Psalm xxii. 6.

³ John xix. 5.

⁴ 1 Corinthians iv. 3.

⁵ 1 Peter ii. 23.

not desire to “know the fellowship of his sufferings”—yea to rejoice in the participation of them? ¹

Christian! dost thou love to be low, and still desire to be lower than ever? The remembrance of the Lord’s precepts will be among your highest privileges. “*Small and despised*” as thou art in thine own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, “thou art precious in the eyes of him,” who gave a price “for thy ransom”—infinitely more precious than “Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba,” ² and who will suffer “none to pluck thee out of his hands.” ³ Many may rebuke thee; many may scorn thee; even thy brethren may treat thee with contempt; yet thy God, thy Redeemer, will not depart from thee, will not suffer thee to depart from him; but will put his Spirit within thee, and bring forth his precepts to thy remembrance, that thou mayest keep them, and many a sweet supporting promise for thy consolation. Therefore “fear not, *thou worm Jacob*: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” ⁴

142. *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.*

THE Psalmist was in no danger, in the midst of his trials, of “*forgetting the precepts of his God*,” while he maintained so just a perception of the exalted character of their Author. Indeed at this time his mind seems to have been filled with the contemplation of the righteous government of God. He therefore repeats his act of adoration, ⁵ not as applied to any particular

¹ Philippians iii. 10. 1 Peter iv. 13.

² Compare Isaiah xliii. 3, 4; with Acts xx. 28.

³ John x. 28.

⁴ Isaiah xli. 14.

⁵ Compare verse 137.

instance of the Lord's dispensations, but as distinguishing the general character of his administration from "everlasting."

But on whom is this "government" appointed to rest? Think of our Immanuel—the human brow encircled with Divine glory—the crucified hands wielding the sceptre of the universe—Him, whom they mocked as the King of the Jews, seated on his own exalted throne—"King of kings, and Lord of lords!" "*The government is upon his shoulder; and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.*"¹ How delightful to join Jehovah himself in the ascription of praise—"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom!"² How glorious also to praise that *everlasting righteousness*, which Jesus brought in, and which is unto all them that believe; which, when once clothed with it, is our infinite glory and reward!

"Every ordinance of man" is connected only with time. The Divine government has a constant reference to the eternity that is past, and to that which is to come. "*And I heard*"—said the enraptured disciple—"the angel of the waters say; *Thou art righteous, which art, and wast, and shalt be; because thou hast judged thus.*"³ Every instance therefore of his righteous administration is a part of that "*everlasting*" display of the Divine character, which constrains the adoration of the heavenly intelligences. "One cried to another, and said, *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*"⁴ His "*law*"—"the manifestation of his "*righteousness*,"—"is the truth." *Thy word is true from the beginning;*

¹ Isaiah ix. 6, 7.

² Psalm xlv. 6. Heb. i. 8.

³ Revelation xvi. 5.

⁴ Isaiah vi. 3.

*and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever."*¹

It was this "truth," that Jesus came into the world to "fulfil—all righteousness."² It was to this truth that he came to bear witness. "*To this end*"—replied he to his judge—"was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth."³ It is this truth, that he employs as the means of sanctification to his people. "*Sanctify them*"—said he in his commendatory prayer—"through thy truth: thy word is truth."⁴ And indeed how does the whole revelation bear the impress of a "God that cannot lie"—of a "covenant ordered in all things"—beyond human contrivance, "and sure" beyond the possibility of a change!⁵ How many dying testimonies have sealed the truth of the precious promises! Joshua,⁶ Simeon,⁷ and a "cloud of witnesses with which we are compassed about,"⁸ have "set to their seals that God is true"⁹—that "all the promises of God are in Christ Jesus yea and amen,"¹⁰—that "all are come to pass unto them, and not one thing has failed thereof." Equally manifest is the truth of his threatenings. Hell is truth seen too late. Those on the right hand and those on the left, at the great day of God will combine to give testimony to the declaration of the "Faithful and True Witness,"¹¹—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."¹²

¹ Verse 160.

³ John xviii. 37.

⁵ Titus i. 2. 2 Samuel xxiii. 5.

⁷ Luke ii. 25—29.

⁹ John iii. 33.

¹¹ Revelation iii. 14.

² Matthew iii. 15.

⁴ John xvii. 17.

⁶ Joshua xxiii. 14.

⁸ Hebrews xii. 1.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. i. 20.

¹² Matthew xxiv. 35.

143. *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delights.*

CHRISTIAN! expect not unmixed sorrow or uninterrupted joy as your present portion. Heaven will be joy without sorrow. Hell will be sorrow without joy. Earth presents to you every joy mingled with grief—every grief tempered with joy. To be accounted “*small and despised*” does not comprise the whole of your trials. Like the great apostle, you must expect not only “*trouble*” without, but “*anguish*” within. “*Without were fightings; within were fears. We were pressed,*” said he, “*out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.*”¹ But if “*troubled on every side,*”² does not “*mercy also encompass you about?*”³ What power is there in the word of God to sustain the discouraged soul? What cheering prospects of hope and deliverance does it set forth! What mighty supports in the endurance of trial does it realize! So that even when “*trouble and anguish have taken hold on us,*” we are still enabled to testify—“*thy commandments are our delights.*”

The endurance of *trouble and anguish* inconceivable to human apprehension, was manifested by Him, who would in all things be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to our salvation, to whom the lighter cup of sorrow is presented. How precious to such is the sympathy of Jesus! What support is given to the believer—what power to lift up his head amid the billows, when by communion with his

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 5; i. 8.

² 2 Cor. iv. 8.

³ Psalm xxxii. 10.

Lord he can call to mind that the sorrow that he underwent was for the sake of his dear purchased people, that they might drink the cup bereft of its bitter, poisonous ingredients!

In this view the scriptural records of the trials of the Lord's people are peculiarly interesting; as also is every fresh testimony of those, who have suffered for the cause of Christ, or who have in other ways "been partakers of his sufferings."¹ These valuable records bear abundant testimony to the inexhaustible resources of support in the book of God. Thus we learn to set a higher value upon the word of God, when we see that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."²

But, as we have before observed, we must make "the commandments *our delights*," if we would realize their supports. The self-will of the natural heart, and the spirit of bondage, have no fellowship with these "*delights*." It is the child of God, whose thoughts are habitually occupied in the word, that finds it to be his food and light, and joy and strength. Even if little of its sensible comfort is experienced, there will be a witness within of the presence and power of God.

Affliction is that time, which unfolds specially the delights of the word of God. It is not as if the child of God was without feeling. "*Trouble and anguish*" are painful sensations of the flesh; but however painful they may be, the "*delights*" of the word of God sustain and overbalance them. The bitterness of the cross best realizes the sweetness of the promises.

¹ 1 Peter iv. 13.

² Romans xv. 4.

Who has not found that in sanctified afflictions the word of God is most happily enjoyed? Specially does the believer "rejoice in tribulation," when it is for the Lord's sake; when the "*trouble and anguish which take hold of him*" is for the love he bears to his dear name.¹ Persecution for his sake, far from appalling him, only endears his service to his heart. It is in his eyes—*not a penalty endured, but a privilege conferred, "to suffer for his name's sake."*²

But contrast the condition of the child of God and the follower of the world in the hour of affliction, The one in the midst of his troubles drinks of the fountain of all-sufficiency; and such is his peace and security, that, "in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him."³ The other, "in the fulness of his sufficiency is in straits."⁴ David could look upward, and find the way of escape in the midst of his trouble; but for Saul, when "*trouble and anguish took hold of him,*" no source of comfort opened to his view. "God was departed;" "God was afar off, and was become his enemy."⁵ It was therefore "*trouble*" without support; "*anguish*" without relief—"trouble and anguish," such as will at length "*take hold of*" them that forget God, when nothing will be left, but the unavailing "cry

¹ Acts v. 41.

² Phil. i. 29. One of the witnesses for the truth, when imprisoned for conscience' sake in Queen Mary's persecution of the Church, is said to have thus written to a friend:—"A prisoner for Christ! What is this for a poor worm? "Such honour have" not "all his saints." Both the degrees which I took in the University have not set me so high as the honour of becoming a prisoner of the Lord.' Philpot again could say of his prison—"In the judgment of the world we are in hell; but I find in it the sweet consolations of heaven.' So also holy Bradford—"My prison is sweeter to me than any parlour, than any pleasure I have had in all my life.'

³ Psalm xxxii. 6.

⁴ Job xx. 22.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxviii. 15, 16.

to the mountains and the hills to fall upon them, and cover them.”¹ Thanks be to God for deliverance from this fearful prospect! Thanks for the hope of unfading “*delights*,” when earthly pleasures shall have passed away! The first sheaf of the heavenly harvest will blot out the painful remembrance of the weeping seed-time which preceded it.² The first moments of heavenly enjoyment will compensate for all the “*troubles and anguish*” of earth; and these moments will last throughout eternity—“*Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him,*”³ *eternally well.*

144. *The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live.*

THE Psalmist again⁴ marks “*the righteousness of the testimonies*” as conformable with the character and government of God. And this “*righteousness*”—as a part of the Divine administration—he justly acknowledges to be “*everlasting*”—not subject to the incessant variations of the human standard of equity, but “*for ever settled in heaven.*”⁵ What solemn weight and authority is due to the dictates of this Divine standard! It seems indeed to be trampled under foot, as if unrighteousness was now directing the government of the world; but its “*righteousness*”—inflexible in its demands, and unalterable in its obligations—will ere long assert its sovereignty over the world, when every other standard shall have passed away. It will be the rule of the Divine procedure at the great day of decision. When

¹ Rev. vi. 16. ² Psalm cxxvi. 5. 6.

³ Isaiah iii. 10.

⁴ Compare verses 137, 138.

⁵ Verse 89.

the "great white throne" is set up—when "the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books are opened, and another book is opened, which is the book of life; and the dead are judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works*"¹—the acknowledgment will be made throughout the universe of God—"The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting."

But this view of their Divine "*righteousness,*" and their "*everlasting*" obligation, naturally suggests the prayer for a more spiritual, enlightened, and experimental acquaintance with them. One ray of this "*understanding*" is of far higher value than all the intellectual or speculative knowledge in the world. The first dawn of it exhibits the infinite difference between light and darkness. The prayer for it implies a measure of it already received; and expresses the heart's desire for a larger increase—"Give me *understanding.*" Let me know the holiness of thy "*testimonies*"—their extent—their perfection—their intimate connexion with every part of my daily walk—with the restraint of my inclination, the regulation of my temper, the direction of every step of my path. And indeed the more devoutly we study them, the more shall we feel our need of supplication for Divine teaching: while, as the effect of this teaching, our views of the government of God will be more adoring and thankful, and our disposition to find fault with what is manifestly beyond the reach of our comprehension, will be subjugated to the humbling influence of faith.

The principle of spiritual and eternal life flows from the enlightened perception of the testimonies of God.

¹ Revelation xx. 11, 12.

“ Give me understanding, and I shall live.” For “ *this is life eternal, that we might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*”¹ His *testimonies* are the revelation of himself. If then we “ have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things,”² our knowledge of them will become more spiritual in its character, more experimental in its comforts, and more practical in its fruits. And thus, “ the life of God in the soul ” will invigorate us for higher attainments in evangelical knowledge, and more steady advancement in Christian holiness. But how infinitely do we live below the full privilege of knowing God in his *testimonies* ! We are Christians of a Scriptural standard, “ forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded ; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”³

¹ John xvii. 3.

² 1 John ii. 20.

³ Phil. iii. 13, 15.

PART XIX.

145. *I cried with my whole heart ; hear me, O Lord, I will keep thy statutes.*—146. *I cried unto thee ; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.*

HERE is presented to us the “pouring out of the soul before the Lord,”¹ a beautiful and encouraging picture of a soul wrestling with God in a few short sentences, with as much power and success as in the most continued length of supplication. Brief as are the petitions, the whole compass of language could not make them more comprehensive. “*Hear me.*” The soul is in earnest—*the whole heart* is engaged in the “cry.” “*Save me,*” includes a sinner’s whole need—pardon—acceptance—access—holiness—strength—comfort—heaven—all in one word—Christ. *Save me*—from self—from Satan—from the world, from the curse of sin—from the wrath of God. This is the need of every moment to the end. “*I cried unto thee,*”—what a mercy to know where to go! The way of access *is not indeed mentioned* in these short ejaculations; but *it is always implied* in every moment’s approach and address to the throne of grace. “*Hear me*” in the name of my all-prevailing Advocate. “*Save me*” through him, whose name is Jesus the Saviour. A moment’s interruption of our view of Jesus casts *for the time* an impenetrable cloud over our way to God, and paralyzes the spirit of prayer. Prayer is not only the sense of guilt, and the cry for

¹ 1 Samuel i. 15.

mercy, but the exercise of faith: and those only are the words of real prayer, that are the utterance of simple faith. This is the cry of "a prince, that has power with God and prevails."¹ The believer feels his warrant to "direct his prayer, and to look up."² As the cripple at the "beautiful gate of the temple"—so is he therefore found "watching daily at the gates"³ of his God, "expecting to receive something of him."⁴ He is always waiting—always asking—living upon what he has, but still hungering for more. Not a word of real prayer is lost. It is as seed—not cast into the earth, exposed to hazard and loss⁵—but cast into the bosom of God—and here—as in the natural harvest—"he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."⁶ The most frequent comers are the largest receivers.

With many, however, the ceremony of prayer is every thing, without any thought, desire, anxiety, or waiting for an answer. Many of God's dear children, too, who in days past never missed the presence of God in prayer, but who "sought it carefully with tears"—are now too easily satisfied with the act of prayer without this "great object of it—the enjoyment of God."⁷ Now here, believer, you are directed to the

¹ Gen. xxxii. 28.² Psalm v. 3.³ Prov. viii. 34.⁴ Acts iii. 5.⁵ Matt. xiii. 3—7.⁶ 2 Cor. ix. 6.

⁷ "The great object in prayer should constantly be the enjoyment of God; and however inadequate the believer's conceptions may be, yet he has a distinct idea of his object; so distinct that you can never impose upon a real saint by offering him something else in the room of it. He knows what he wants; and he knows that this or that is not the thing which he wants."—*Augustine*, Epistle 121.

In the same Epistle he very judiciously recommends the use of short and quick ejaculations, (like these under consideration,) rather than long protracted supplications, unless the mind be in a fervent frame; in which case the petitions, as he justly observes, may be indefinitely prolonged, without incurring the censure implied in Matthew vi. 7.

recovery and more sure preservation of your lost privilege. You lament your deficiencies, your inability in the hour of temptation, your indulgence of ease, your unfaithfulness of heart. But is your “cry” continually ascending “*with your whole heart?*” Your soul would not be so empty of comfort, if your mouth were not so empty of prayer. The Lord never *charges presumption* upon the frequency or extent of your supplications; but he is often ready to “*upbraid you with your unbelief,*”¹ that you are so reluctant in your approach, and so straitened in your desires—that you are so unready to receive what he is so ready to give—that your vessels are too narrow to take in his full blessing—that you are content with drops when he has promised “floods,”—yea “rivers of living water,”²—and above all, that you are so negligent in praising him for what you have already received.

It is this spirit of continued instancy in prayer³ that preserves a child of God in temptation. Satan strikes at all of God in his soul. Unbelief readily yields to his suggestions. This is the element in which he lives—the ceaseless warfare in which he is engaged. Will then the customary devotion of morning and evening (*even supposing it to be sincere*) suffice for such an emergency? No. The Christian must “*put on the whole armour of God;*” and buckle on his panoply with increasing prayer and watchfulness in the influence of the Spirit.⁴ If he be backward in

¹ Mark xvi. 14.

² Isaiah xlv. 3. John vii. 38.

³ Romans xii. 12.

⁴ Eph. vi. 13—18. “The violence of temptation stupifies me,—said Luther on one occasion, speaking of his own experience,—that I cannot open my mouth. *As soon as ever it pleases God that I can lift up my heart in prayer, and make use of Scriptural expressions, it ceases to prevail.*”—*Milner*, vol. v. p. 484.

prayer, let him not give way to indolence. If his heart be dead and cold, let him rather cry and wait (as Luther was used to do), 'till it warmed and enlivened. The hypocrite, indeed, would be satisfied with the barren performance of the duty. But the child of God, while he mourns in the dust—"Behold, I am vile!"¹—still holds on, though sometimes with a cry that probably finds no utterance with his lips;² that vents itself only with tears, or "groanings that cannot be uttered."³ And shall such a cry fail to "enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth"? Impossible! "*The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.*"⁴

But why is the believer so earnest for an audience?—why so restless in his cries for salvation? Is it not, that he loves "*the statutes*" of his God; that he is grieved on account of his inability to keep them; and that he longs for grace and strength ever to be found in them? "*Hear me; I will keep thy statutes. Save me; and I shall keep thy testimonies*"—a most satisfactory evidence of a heart upright with God. For we cannot keep them, except as saved sinners. The nature of sin can have no fellowship with *the statutes* of God. When, saved, then indeed are they *our delights*.

Lord! thou knowest, how hard we find it to bring our hearts to the spiritual work of prayer; and how we nourish our unbelief by our distance from thee. Oh pour upon us this "Spirit of grace and supplication." "Teach us to pray"⁵—even our hearts—"our whole hearts"—to "*cry unto thee.*" Give us the privilege

¹ Job xl. 4; also xlii. 5, 6.

² Exodus xiv. 15. 1 Samuel i. 13. Nehemiah ii. 4.

³ Rom. viii. 26.

⁴ Ps. vi. 8; xxxviii. 9.

⁵ Luke xi. 1.

of real communion with thee—the only satisfying joy of earth or heaven. Then shall we “run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge our hearts.”¹

147. *I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried; I hoped in thy word.*—148. *Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word.*

THE Psalmist here brings before us not only the fervency, but the seasons, of his supplication. Like Daniel he had his set times of prayer—“three times a day.”² Nor did this frequency of seeking the Lord satisfy him, without an habitual “waiting all the day upon his God.”³ Prayer was indeed his meat, and drink, and breath. “*I give myself unto prayer.*”⁴ His sketch of the character of the “blessed man, delighting in the law of his God, and”—as an evidence of this delight—“meditating therein day and night”⁵—furnished accurately but unconsciously a picture of himself. For early and late was he found in the enjoyment of the privileges of the word of God; “*preventing the dawning of the morning*” for prayer, and again—“*the night-watches, that he might meditate in the word.*” But to look above the example of David to David’s Lord; surely “it was written” most peculiarly “for our learning,” that Jesus—after a laborious Sabbath—every moment of which appears to have

¹ Luke xi. 32.

² Psalm lv. 17, with Daniel vi. 10.

³ Psalm xxv. 5.

⁴ Psalm cix. 4. ‘But I prayer,’ Heb.—all over prayer—always ready for prayer—at all seasons, besides the frequency of set times of communion—one, whose life is a continual prayer—“prayer without ceasing.” 1 Thessalonians v. 17.

⁵ Psalm i. 2.

been spent for the benefit of sinners; and when his body, subject to the same infirmities, and therefore needing the same refreshment with our own, seemed to require repose—" *in the morning, rising up a great while before day, went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*"¹ On another occasion did his " *eyes prevent the night-watches,*" when intensely engaged in the service of his Father and of his Church. For when by the ordination of his Apostles he was about to lay the foundation of his Church, it is told of him, that " *he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*"²

These examples make it evident, that when the heart is really occupied for God, time will always be found for secret duties; ³ and rather will be redeemed, as with David, from sleep, than lost from prayer. To see a man, like the King of Israel, engaged in the most active employments of life; yet "sanctifying" such frequent seasons in the short period of each successive day "with the word of God and prayer," exposes the insincerity of the excuse, that no time can be spared from the pressing avocations of the day for the service God. It is not, that such men are busy, and have no time for prayer; but that they are worldly, and have no heart to pray.

¹ Mark i. 21—35.

² Luke vi. 12—16.

³ Most instructive is the example of Mr. Cadogan, as recorded by his admirable biographer. 'Feeling strongly that he must walk with God in secret at any rate; when he had company he would often retire from them into his study, rather than omit his accustomed waiting upon his God. Often has he been found there, when most of the family were gone to rest, surprised on his knees by the domestic, who usually took care of the house.'—*Cecil's Life of Cadogan.*

Perhaps in an observation once made to an excellent minister, the importance of the truth may furnish an apology for the quaintness of the dress—'If you did not plough in your closet, you would not reap in the pulpit.'

This subject illustrates (and the uniform experience of the Lord's people warrants the remark)—how much our spirituality of desire and enjoyment depends upon the daily consecration of *the first fruits of our time* to the Lord. With many of us, opportunities for heavenly communion during the day may be unavoidably straitened. But "*the night watches*" and "*the dawning of the morning*" afford seasons free from interruption, when our God expects to hear from us, and when the refreshments of our visits to him, and his abidance with us, will often constrain us to acknowledge—" *Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"¹ The thoughts of God were clearly the first visitors to David's waking mind;² and to this may be ascribed in a great measure his habitual success in realizing the presence of God throughout the day. Our lukewarmness and our want of spiritual enjoyment, may often be traced to that morning-indolence, which not only throws the business of the day into confusion, but also consumes the time in self-indulgence or trifling, which should have been redeemed for this sacred privilege of intercourse with God. For—not to speak of the seasonableness of the early hours for devotion—the very exertion made to overcome "this lust of the flesh," and to steal a march upon the demands of the world, is an exercise of self-denial, and an opportunity of honouring God, "that shall in no wise lose its reward." No remembrance of the past will be so refreshing at a dying hour as the time that was spent for God.

And, even, if there should not be actual enjoyments, at least let us honour God by the spirit of expectancy. "*I hoped in thy word!*"³—There can be no

¹ 1 John i. 3.

² See Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18.

³ One of Melancthon's correspondents describes Luther thus—' I

exercise of faith in the neglect of prayer; but the ground of faith, and that which gives to it life, hope, and joy—is the view of God in his word *as a promising God*. Therefore to “*hope in his word*” is to build up ourselves upon our most holy faith,¹ and to lay all our desires, all our cares, all our weights, and burdens, upon the solid unsinking foundation of the word of promise, not one jot or tittle of which has ever fallen to the ground.

David’s “night watches” were well employed in “*meditation in the word.*” For, in order to stay ourselves upon it in time of need, it must occupy our whole study, thought and love. Instability of faith arises from a want of fixed recollection of the promises of God. This superficial habit may suffice for times of quietness; but amid the billows of temptation we can only cast “anchor sure and stedfast” in an habitual

cannot enough admire the extraordinary cheerfulness, constancy, faith, and hope of the man in these trying and vexatious times. He constantly feeds these gracious affections by a very diligent study of the word of God. *Then not a day passes, in which he does not employ in prayer at least three of his very best hours.* Once I happened to hear him at prayer. Gracious God! what spirit and what faith is there in his expressions: He petitions God with as much reverence, as if he was in the divine presence; and yet with as firm a hope and confidence, as he would address a father or a friend. ‘I know’—said he—‘thou art our Father and our God; and therefore I am sure thou wilt bring to nought the persecutors of thy children. For shouldst thou fail to do this, thine own cause being connected with ours, would be endangered. It is entirely thine own concern. We, by thy providence, have been compelled to take a part. Thou therefore wilt be our defence.’ Whilst I was listening to Luther praying in this manner at a distance, my soul seemed on fire within me, to hear the man address God so like a friend, and yet with so much gravity and reverence; and also to hear him, in the course of his prayer, insisting upon the promises contained in the Psalms, as if he was sure his petitions would be granted.—*Milner’s History*, vol. v. p. 565. Again referred to in Scott’s Continuation, vol. i. p. 77. Was not this an illustration of David’s confidence—*I hoped in thy word?*

¹ Jude 20.

and intelligent confidence upon the full, free, firm promise of the word. Let it therefore be the food of our meditation, and the ground of our support, when our suit seems to hang at the throne of grace without any tokens of present acceptance or consolation. Often, when cast down by the sense of our wants, will it raise us up, and supply strength for fresh conflict, and the earnest of blessed victory. There is always ground sure enough for faith. May the Lord ever furnish us with faith enough for our daily work, conflict, consolation, and establishment!

149. *Hear my voice according unto thy loving-kindness ;
O Lord, quicken me according to thy judgment.*

IN the eyes of the world, David appeared "in all his glory," when seated on his throne and surrounded with the magnificence of his kingdom. But never did he appear so glorious in the sight of God, as when presenting himself in the character of a suppliant before the mercy-seat. Here we see him seeking an audience of the King of kings, and admitted into his presence only to send up reiterated cries for quickening grace. And do not I need the same grace every moment in every duty? Does not "the gift of God within me" need to be daily "stirred up."⁷ Are not "the things that remain" often ready to die"?² Then "*hear my voice, O Lord; quicken me.*"

But let me seek to "order my cause before God." If I would urge my suit successfully, I must "fill my mouth with arguments."³ And if I can plead anything from the character of my judge favourable to my cause; if I can prove that promises have been

¹ 2 Timothy i. 6.

² Rev. iii. 2.

³ Job xxiii. 4.

made in my behalf, these will be most encouraging earnestness of a successful issue. Now David had been so used thus to plead in cases of extremity, that arguments suited to his present distress were always ready at hand. When he comes therefore as a poor sinner to ask for mercy and grace in time of need, he accompanies his petition with pleas of irresistible power; reminding God of his own character of "*loving-kindness and judgment*," as affording the hope, that mercy would be vouchsafed to him abundant in measure, and seasonable in application.

And with how much greater advantage than ever may these pleas now be urged before my God!—"With what full assurance of faith,"¹ may I now ask to be heard on account of that transcendent proof of "*loving-kindness*" manifested in the gift of God's dear Son—not only as his chiefest mercy, but as the pledge of every other mercy²—and manifested too at the fittest time³—"according to his judgment"—after the inefficiency of the power of reason⁴ and the sanctions of the law⁵ to influence the heart, had been most clearly displayed. And how is my faith encouraged in retracing the records of the Lord's "*loving-kindness*" to my soul! And how clear is my persuasion of his "*judgment*" in dealing wisely, reasonably, and tenderly with me according to his infallible perception of my need! Often does the remembrance of the past raise me above the present difficulties, and strengthen me to hold fast the enjoyment of waiting for him. Gladly will I "set to my seal," that "*the Lord is a God of judgment*;" and that "*blessed are they that wait for him.*"⁶ He knows not

¹ Hebrews x. 22.

² See Gal. iv. 4.

³ Compare Jer. xxxi. 31—33.

⁴ See Romans viii. 32.

⁵ Compare 1 Cor. i. 21.

⁶ Isaiah xxx. 18.

only what grace is needed, but at what time. Not a moment sooner will it come; not a moment later will it be delayed. 'As thou wilt, what thou wilt, when thou wilt,'¹—is the expression of faith and resignation, with which all must be committed to the Lord, waiting for the end, in humility, desire, expectation. And if, in pleading my suit for an hearing "*according to his loving-kindness,*" my poor, polluted, lifeless petitions should find no liberty of approach; may I be but enabled to direct one believing look to "the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne;"² and I will not doubt that my feeblest offering shall come up as a memorial before God.

150. *They draw nigh that follow after mischief; they are far from thy law.* 151. *Thou are near, O Lord: and all thy commandments are truth.*

DAVID'S situation, surrounded with the enemies of God, had probably quickened him to prayer for a favourable audience, and for seasonable grace. And now he enjoyed his God as "a very present help in trouble,"³ and his dependence on his "*commandments*" was a "true" and solid foundation of comfort to his soul. An awful character indeed does he give of the ungodly. "*They are far from God's law*"—and that not from ignorance, but from wilful enmity. God witnesses against them, that "they hate instruction, and cast his words behind them."⁴ And they are not ashamed to consent, that "this witness is true"—"They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."⁵ No wonder, therefore, that their enmity

¹ Thomas a Kempis.

² Rev. v. 6.

³ Psalm xlvi. 1.

⁴ Psalm l. 17. Comp. Prov. i. 22, 25, 29.

⁵ Job xxi. 14.

to the law should shew itself in enmity to the people of God—that those that “*are far from God’s law*” should “*draw nigh to follow after mischief*,”¹ But if “*they draw nigh*,” the Lord is near still. “*I am thy shield*”²—saith he to his distressed child—who echoes back the promise in the cheerfulness of faith—“*Thou art my hiding-place, and my shield; I hope in thy word.*”³ Elisha knew the power of this shield, when he quelled the alarm of his terrified servant. He beheld them “*draw nigh that follow after mischief*,” but the eye of faith assures his heart; and when “the Lord opened the eyes of the young man,” he too was enabled to testify—“*Thou art near, O Lord!*”⁴

But near as the Lord is to his people to shield them from their enemies, is he not yet nearer still, when he dwells in their hearts? Here is “his temple,”⁵ his desired habitation—like Zion of old, of which he said,—This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.”⁶ This is the dwelling, which, once possessed of its Divine Inhabitant, will never be left desolate.

¹ He cannot brook the child, that hateth the father; he cannot mind the servant, that careth not for the master. If ye were of the world, the world would love you; ye should dwell quietly. There would be no grief, no molestation, if the devil dwelt in you (which God forbid). He would not stir up his knights to besiege your house . . . but because Christ dwelleth in you (as he does by faith); therefore stirreth he up his first-begotten son the world, to seek how to disquiet you, to rob you, to spoil you, to destroy you, and perchance your dear Father, to try to make known to you and to the world, that ye are destinate to another dwelling than here on earth, to another city than man’s eyes have seen at any time, hath given or will give power to Satan or to the world to take from you the things which he hath lent you; and by taking away, to try your fidelity, obedience, and love towards him (for ye may not love them above him), as by giving that ye have, and keeping it, he hath declared his love towards you.—*Bradford’s Epistles—Fathers of the English Church*, vol. vi. pp. 58, 59.

² Gen. xv. 1.

³ Verse 114.

⁴ Comp. 2 Kings vi. 14—17.

⁵ 2 Cor. vi. 16.

⁶ Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14.

Our spiritual enemies, like David's earthly persecutors, are ever present and active. The devouring "lion,"¹ or the insinuating "serpent,"² is "*nigh to follow after mischief*;" and so much the more dangerous, as his approaches are invisible. Nigh also is a tempting, ensnaring world: and nearer still a lurking world of sin within, separating us from communion with our God. But in turning habitually and immediately to our strong hold, we can enjoy the confidence—"Thou art near, O Lord." Though "the High and Lofty one, whose name is holy;"³ though the just and terrible God, yet art thou made nigh to thy people,⁴ and they to thee,⁵ "by the blood of the Cross." And thou dost manifest thy presence to them in "the Son of thy love."

Indeed to the Son himself, the nearness of his Father's presence was a source of consolation and support when "*they drew nigh that followed after mischief*." "*He is near*"—said he—"which justifieth me: who will contend with me; let us stand together. Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? So they all shall wax old as doth a garment: the moth shall eat them up."⁶ "*Behold*"—said he to his affrighted disciples, as his hour drew near—"the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered every one to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."⁷ And thus his people in earthly desolation have recourse to the word and promises of their God; and in the recollection of his faithful, ever-present help, "set to their seal," that

¹ 1 Peter v. 8.

² Rev. xii. 9.

³ Isaiah lvii. 15.

⁴ Col. i. 20.

⁵ Eph. ii. 13.

⁶ Isaiah l. 8, 9.

⁷ John xvi. 32.

“*all his commandments are truth.*” The mischief intended for their souls only serves to prove, that “thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.”¹

But may the Lord not only be brought near as it respects our interest in him, but be kept near in communion with him! Let our hearts be sacred to him. Let us be most careful to watch against any strangeness with this beloved Friend, and to cultivate a growing cordiality and closeness in our walk with him. If our character is formed by the society in which we live, what treasures of wisdom and knowledge should we find! what a spirit of unbounded love should we imbibe by a nearer and more constant intercourse with our God; willing as he is to impart himself freely, inexhaustibly unto us. In a backsliding state, we must expect to lose this heavenly *nearness* to him.² In a state of darkness, it is the exercise of faith, to believe that unseen he is *near*; and the practical influence of faith will lead us to speak, and pray, and think, and praise, as “seeing him who is invisible.”³ In a state of enjoyment, let us anticipate the time, when he will be ever *near* to us.

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”⁴

152. *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old, that thou hast founded them for ever.*

THE Psalmist's conviction just stated, of the “*truth*”

¹ Psalm v. 12.

² Cant. v. 2—6.

³ Hebrews xi. 27.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 3.

of God's word, was the result of early consideration. He had "*known it of old.*" It is indeed expressly revealed in contrast with the precarious security of earthly hopes—"the voice said Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? *All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*"¹

But let us mark this eternal basis of "*the testimonies of God.*" The whole plan of redemption was emphatically "*founded for ever.*" The Saviour "*was foreordained before the foundation of the world.*"² The people of God are "*chosen in Christ before the world began!*"³ The great Author "*declares the end from the beginning,*"⁴ and thus clears his dispensations from any charge of mutability or contingency. Every event in the church is fixed, permitted, and provided for—not in the passing moment of time, but in the counsels of eternity. When therefore the "*testimonies*" set forth God's faithful engagements with his people of old, the recollection that they are "*founded for ever*" gives us a present and unchangeable interest in them. And when we see that they are grounded upon the oath and promise of God—the two "*immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie*"⁵—we may truly "*have strong consolation*" in venturing every hope for eternity upon this rock; nor need we be dismayed to see all our earthly dependences—"the world, and the lust, and the fashion of it—passing away" before us.⁶ Yet we are most of us strangely attached to this fleeting scene, even when experience and divine teaching, have instructed us in its vanity:

¹ Isaiah xl. 1—3.

² 1 Peter i. 20. Comp. Rev. xiii. 8.

³ Eph. i. 4. 2 Tim. i. 9.

⁴ Isaiah xlvi. 9, 10.

⁵ Heb. vi. 16—18.

⁶ 1 John ii. 17. 1 Cor. vii. 31.

and it is not until repeated proofs of this truth have touched us very closely, in the destruction of our dearest consolations, that we take the full comfort of the enduring foundation of God's "testimonies" and of the imperishable character of their treasure.

The consideration of this subject is fraught with special support in a dying hour. 'I am on the borders of an unknown world,' (may the believer say); 'but I have "a hope that maketh not ashamed,"¹ which at this moment of peril is as "an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast;" and in the strength of which I do not fear to plunge into eternity. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."² I know—not his sufficiency merely, but his *All-sufficiency*. I know his conquering power over the great enemies of my soul. I know that he has "spoiled the principalities and powers"³ of hell of the strength to triumph over his ransomed people. I know also, that he is "the Lord; he changeth not;"⁴ his word changes not: his testimonies abide the same: "*I have known of old, that he has founded them for ever.*" We look for the removing of those "things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."⁵ The scoffer may say,—If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do!"⁶ Let God himself give the answer—"*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.*"⁷

¹ Rom. v. 5. ² 2 Tim. i. 12. ³ Col. ii. 15. ⁴ Mal. iii. 6.

⁵ Heb. xii. 27.

⁶ Psalm xi. 3.

⁷ Isaiah li. 6.

PART XX.

153. *Consider mine affliction, and deliver me; for I do not forget thy law.*

THE believer in his severest trouble knows not the aggravation of having no pitying eye or friendly help. This was indeed one of the bitter dregs in the Saviour's "cup of trembling," which had well-nigh overwhelmed him with the distress of unmitigated sorrow.—"Reproach"—said he in the agony of his soul—"hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."¹ This depth of trial combined with every other part of his unknown sufferings to make him "such an High Priest as became us,"² "touched with the feeling of our infirmities;"³ "considering our afflictions: and "in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."⁴ Mark the sympathy with which he "considered the affliction" of his people in Egypt—"And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows."⁵ At a subsequent period of their history, "his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel"⁶—a cheering example of that compassionate interest, with which, "in all his people's afflictions, he is himself afflicted."⁷ Well may his

¹ Psalm lxix. 20. Compare xxii. 11.

² Hebrews vii. 26.

³ Heb. iv. 15.

⁴ Heb. ii. 18.

⁵ Exod. iii. 7, also ii. 25.

⁶ Judges x. 16.

⁷ Isaiah lxiii. 9.

people take encouragement to pray—“*Consider mine afflictions.*” “Now therefore let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us.”¹

But not only doth he show himself sympathizing to “*consider*” us, but mighty to “*deliver.*” “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, *mighty to save.*”² The consciousness, that “*we do not forget his law,*” furnishes us with a plea to urge before the Lord, that he would not forget to “*consider our affliction and deliver*” us; and is of itself an evidence that the affliction has performed its appointed work. A similar plea is urged again and again in this Psalm—“Save me; *for I have sought thy precepts.* Let thine hand help me; *for I have chosen thy precepts.* Seek thy servant; *for I do not forget thy commandments.*”³ Let me then expect in mine affliction the fulfilment of this gracious promise—“Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me and I will deliver him: I will be with him in trouble; I will answer him, and honour him.”⁴ In the midst of my trials let me prepare my hymn of praise for this kind consideration and his faithful deliverance—“I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities, and hast not shut me up in the hand of the enemy; thou hast set my feet in a large room!”⁵ Let me then remember my affliction, only as it may be the means of increasing my acquaintance with my tender and Almighty friend. Poor

¹ Neh. ix. 32.

² Isaiah lxiii. 1.

³ Verses 94, 173, 176.

⁴ Psalm xci. 14, 15.

⁵ Psalm xxxi. 7, 8.

and afflicted as I may be, let me be more poor and afflicted still, if I may but have fresh evidence that he “thinketh upon me”¹—that he “*considers my affliction,*” and in his own gracious time and way will “*deliver me.*”

154. *Plead my cause and deliver me; quicken me according to thy word.*

OPPRESSED as the Psalmist appeared to be at this moment, he is at no loss where to apply for help. He carries his righteous cause to him, who “stilleth the enemy and the avenger.”² “Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”³ Thus does the believer, throughout his warfare maintain “the patience of hope,”⁴ waiting for the Lord, “until he plead his cause, and execute judgment for him.”⁵ He knows, that if there is an accuser to resist,⁶ there is “an Advocate” to plead,⁷ who could testify of his prevailing acceptance in the court of heaven—“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always.”⁸ Our Redeemer does indeed “*plead our cause*” successfully for our “*deliverance;*” when but for his powerful advocacy we must have stood speechless in the judgment—helpless, without any prospect of the restoration of favour or acceptance. Awful indeed

¹ Psalm xl. 17.

² Psalm viii. 2.

³ Psalm xxxv. 1—3.

⁴ 1 Thess. i. 3.

⁵ Micah vii. 9.

⁶ Zech. iii. 1.

⁷ 1 John ii. 1.

⁸ John xi. 41, 42.

was the cause which he had to manage. We could neither deny the charge, nor offer compensation for the injury. We could neither “stand in the judgment,” nor flee from the impending wrath. But we had at that moment of infinite peril (and we *still have*) “an advocate with the Father.” The voice that was once heard in heaven exactly answers to this petition for deliverance—“*Deliver them from going down to the pit ; I have found a ransom.*”¹ This ransom is no less than the price of his own “precious blood,”² “shed for many for the remission of sins”³—a ransom which has merited and obtained eternal “*deliverance*”⁴ for his people, and which still pleads for the expiation of the daily and hourly guilt which attaches to their holiest services, and defiles their happiest approaches to their God. When therefore Satan accuses me : yea, when my own heart condemns me, I may look upward to my heavenly Advocate—“*Plead my cause and deliver me.*”⁵ “O Lord, I am oppressed ; undertake for me. Thou wilt answer, O Lord, my God.”⁶

Poor trembling sinner ! take courage. “Your Redeemer is mighty—he will thoroughly plead your cause,”⁷ and leave no charge unanswered. But you say—‘How know I that he speaks for me?’ Yet

¹ Job xxxiii. 24.

² 1 Peter i. 19.

³ Matthew xxvi. 28.

⁴ Hebrews ix. 12.

⁵ “The word translated “*deliver me,*” is taken from the office of a redeemer or next of kin amongst the Israelites, to whom it belonged to redeem the inheritance, or ransom the person, of his impoverished or enslaved relative ; and also to be his patron and defender against injustice and oppression, and the avenger of his blood, if he was slain.”—*Scott.* The use therefore of this word in the original in this verse naturally points the believer’s attention to him, who is indeed near of kin to him, and has combined all the offices of the ancient redeemer in his one beloved person ; and therefore at once illustrates and warrants the view that is here given of the passage.

⁶ Isaiah xxxviii. 14. Psalm xxxviii. 15. Margin and P. T.

⁷ Jer. i. 34.

if not for you, for whom does he speak? Who needs an advocate more than you? He pleads indeed nothing favourable of you; but much, very much, for you. For he pleads the merit of his own blood, "that taketh away the sin of the world"¹—even that great sin of "unbelief," of which his Spirit is now "convincing"² you; and which you are now made to feel, lament, and resist, as the bitterest foe to your peace. And does he not "ever live to make intercession for you?" Why then hesitate to apply the certain and consoling inference, that "he is able to save to the uttermost?"³ Why discouraged by the sight of sin, temptation, backsliding, difficulty and fear, arising before you on every side; when, after you have taken the most extended view of the prospect of sorrow, this one word "*uttermost*" goes beyond it? If you feel it hard to believe, send up your cry—"Help thou mine unbelief."⁴ Only do not dishonour him by the wilful indulgence of despondency; and do not add the sin of disobedience, in delaying this moment to come to him.

After all, however, even while exercising faith in our heavenly Advocate, we cannot but mourn our sluggishness in his service. Our pleading with him therefore for *deliverance* is well accompanied with the supplication—"Quicken me." Every moment's perseverance depends upon this Divine supply. Blessed be God for the sure warrant of expectation—"According to thy word!" Here we shall receive not only the living principle, but its lively operation; not only the fire to kindle the lamp, but the oil to feed the flame. For he that is our Advocate to "*plead*" for

¹ John i. 29.

² John xvi. 8, 9.

³ Hebrews vii. 25.

⁴ Mark ix. 24.

us, and our Saviour to “*deliver*” us, is also our quickening Head, filled with “the residue of the Spirit” to “*revive his work*” in the hearts of his people. He “*hath ascended on high, and hath received gifts for men : yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.*”¹ Do we therefore want a heart to pray, to praise, to believe, to love? Let us only look to an ascended Saviour, sending down the life-giving influence from above, as the purchase of his blood, the fruit of his intercession; and our hope will be enlivened, our faith established, and the graces of the Spirit will abound to the glory of our God.

155. *Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not thy statutes.*

How striking the contrast!—how awfully destitute the condition. They have no one to *consider their affliction*—no one to *deliver them*—no one to *plead their cause*. Indeed, all the misery that an immortal soul is capable of enduring throughout eternity is included in this sentence—“*Salvation is far from the wicked.*” The full picture of it is drawn by our Lord himself—“The rich man died and was buried; and *in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*”² The present enjoyment of “*salvation*” is *far from the wicked.* “There is no peace saith my God, to the wicked.”³ Their common employments are “*sin.*”⁴ Their “*sacrifice is an abomination.*”⁵ Their life is “*without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world.*”⁶ But who can tell the curse of eter-

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 18.

² Luke xvi. 22, 23, 26.

³ Isaiah lvii. 21.

⁴ Prov. xxi. 4.

⁵ Prov. xv. 8.

⁶ Eph. ii. 12.

nity, with this “*salvation far from them?*” To be eternally shut out from God—from heaven! To be eternally shut in with the enemies of God, and the heirs of hell! Fellow-Christians—look from what ye have escaped—what ye were, when “ye were sometime afar off”—what ye would have been now and for ever, had ye not “in Christ Jesus been made nigh by the blood of Christ.”¹

But whence is it, that “*the wicked*” are in this inexpressibly awful condition? Is not “*salvation*” offered to them? Are they shut out from hope, and sternly refused an interest in the covenant? Oh! no: it is their own doing, or rather their own undoing. Would they but seek the ways of God, they might plead for *deliverance*; yea, they might have a prevailing Advocate to *plead their cause, and deliver them*. But now *salvation* is far from them, because “*they are far from God’s law*.” It does not fly from them—but they fly from it. Every act is a stride of mind, more or less vigorous in departure from God. Nay—such is their contempt for God, that “they will *not even seek his statutes*.” They “desire not the knowledge of his ways.” They say to God—“Depart from us,”² God therefore will say to them—“Depart from me.”³ It is not then so much God that punishes them, as they that punish themselves. Their own sin—the necessity of the case—punishes them. They “will not come to Christ, that they might have life:”⁴ “so that they are without excuse”⁵—die they must.

But who are “*the wicked?*” Alas! this is a melancholy question, as involving within its sphere

¹ Ephesians ii. 13.

² Job xxi. 14.

³ Matthew vii. 23; xxv. 41.

⁴ John v. 40.

⁵ Romans i. 20.

so large a proportion of what passes for amiable, virtuous and lovely in the estimation of the world. Not to speak of those, whose character is broadly written upon their foreheads; it includes "all that forget God,"¹ however blameless their moral character, or their external Christian profession. It is determined upon infallible and immutable authority. It is the decree of our eternal Judge—"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;"² and if none of his, then it follows in unavoidable consequence, that "*salvation is far from him.*"

Oh! could we but persuade such of their awful state. Oh! could we awake them from their death-like—deadly sleep—slumbering on the borders of eternity! on the brink of ruin! But they are impaled in their own self-esteem, or in the favourable comparison drawn between themselves and many around them; forgetting that the rule, by which they will be judged, is not the world's standard of moral rectitude, but the statutes of a holy, heart-searching God; forgetting too, that all may be decency without, while all is corruption within. Let them bring their hearts to the test of an honest and prayerful scrutiny of the statutes of God; and while they must confess themselves guilty before God, a sense of danger would awaken the hearty cry for salvation³ which would not then "*be far from them.*"⁴ For "the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he will also hear their cry, and *will save them.*"⁵

O thou Almighty Spirit, whose power is alone able

¹ Psalm ix. 17.

² Romans viii. 9.

³ Acts xvi. 30.

⁴ See Psalm lxxxv. 9.

⁵ Psalm cxlv. 18, 19.

to "turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,"¹ "raise up thy power and come among us;" "rend the heavens and come down;"² rend the hearts of sinners, of the ungodly, the moral, the naturally amiable, the self-righteous. "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord."³

156. *Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord; quicken me according to thy judgments.*

THE Psalmist, when speaking of the wretched condition of "the wicked," is naturally led to adore the "mercies of the Lord," which had "made him to differ." For indeed to this source alone must we trace the distinction between those who are "quicken," and those who are "dead in trespasses and sins." "God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; by grace ye are saved."⁴

And truly "great" indeed and "tender are the Lord's mercies"—"great" in their extent; "tender" in their exercise. "Great" was that first purpose of "mercy," which set us apart for his glory.⁵ "Great" was that first display of "mercy" when he looked upon us in his "time of love," rescued us from Satan, sin, death, and hell, and drew us to himself.⁶ "Tender" also is that continued stream of mercy, which follows us through every step of our wilderness journey; which compasses us about, abounds towards us, keeps us steadfast, or restores us when wandering, and will preserve us to the end.

¹ Luke i. 17.

² Psalm lxxxiii. 16.

³ Eph. i. 4—6.

⁴ Isaiah lxiv. 1.

⁵ Ephesians ii. 1, 4, 5.

⁶ Ezek. xvi. 6—8.

Happy are we if, we can join in this sweet acknowledgment—“*Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord,*”—But what poor returns have we made for this infinite love! Surely the petition for quickening grace suits us well. This was the constant burden of David’s prayer. For he was not like many professors, who arrive at an easy assurance of their interest in the gospel, and can maintain this assurance in all the carelessness of an idle and unfruitful life. No; he was a believer of a very high standard; he was desirous, not only of proving his title to the covenant blessings, but of living in their habitual enjoyment.

Often as this petition has been brought before us in the course of this psalm, it is too important ever to be passed over. Let us at this time use it for the purpose of individual self-inquiry. In what respects do I need quickening grace? Are my views of sin, and especially of the sin of my own heart, slight and superficial? Do they fail in producing humility, abasement, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of conduct? If it be so—“*Quicken me, O my God!*” Does my apprehension of a Saviour’s love serve to embitter sin to me? to crucify sin in me, to warm and enliven my heart with love to him, and zeal in his service? If I am convicted of coldness to such a Saviour, and sluggishness in such a service, I need to pray—“*O Lord, quicken me!*” And how do I find it with regard to prayer itself? Are not my prayers general—unfrequent—wandering? Is not service too often constrained, a forced duty, rather than a privilege and delight? “*O Lord, quicken me!*”

Such, and similar questions, will be helpful to the necessary duty of self-inspection, and will stir up the prayer for quickening grace. The evil of a dead and drooping state must not be lightly thought of;

for at such times the difference between the believer and the worldling, or at least between the believer and the formalist, is scarcely visible. O believer, you have great need to carry your complaint again and again unto the Lord: “*Quicken me—quicken me—according to thy judgments,*” according to those gracious promises, which are the method of thy proceedings, and the rule of thy dispensations of grace. You cannot be too earnest to welcome the breathings of the Spirit, or too cautious, that you resist not his Divine impression by your own indolence. When the Spirit quickens you with his influence, do you quicken him with your supplications—“*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.*”¹ Persuade—entreat—constrain his stay. Enlivened by his energy, how happy, and in your own sphere how useful, a member of the Church of Christ you may be found! Your soul will be invigorated—your graces strengthened—and your affections elevated in humble, cheerful, steady dependence upon the Saviour, and in daily renewed devotedness to his service. The more the spiritual life is thus “*exercised unto godliness,*” the more delightfully will you realize the active service and everlasting praise, which will constitute the perfection of heavenly enjoyment. “*His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face: and his name shall be in their foreheads.*”²

157. *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.*

DAVID'S experience is common to all the servants of God. “*Many indeed are their persecutors and*

¹ Canticles iv. 16.

² Revelation xxii. 3, 4.

their enemies.” This is a solemn cost. Let those who are setting out in the Christian course count it well. From neglect of our Lord’s rule of Scriptural calculation,¹ many have failed of “enduring to the end.” They seem to begin well; but they stop short, and turn back. They are zealous, but inconsiderate; warm-hearted, but ignorant of themselves, their work, and their resources. We would say therefore to all beginners, and especially to those of a sanguine temperament—Let your course be commenced with serious consideration, and jealous self-scrutiny. Beware of hasty determinations. See to it that your resources are drawn, not from your own resolutions, or from the sincerity and ardour of your love: but from the fulness that is treasured up in Jesus for your present distress. Feel every step of your way by the light of the sacred word. If you expect a life of steady and uniform consistency to command the esteem and respect of an ungodly world, you have forgotten both the word and the example of Him whom you profess to follow. (“The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you”²)—and you will soon be ready to exclaim; “*Many are my persecutors and mine enemies.*” For if their hostility is not always active, it is not quelled or wearied out. The enmity “is not dead, but sleepeth.” If, however, on the other hand, their unexpected surprisals and inveteracy should daunt you in the conflict, you are again forgetting the word of support and encouragement in the most awful crisis; “*My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*”³ Thus the word of God will be “the armour of righteousness on

¹ Luke xiv. 28—33.

² John xv. 20.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

the right hand and on the left." ¹ Presumption is cast down, self-confidence is humbled, and the trembling simplicity of dependence upon an Almighty arm is upheld and honoured.

Count then upon the difficulties that beset the heavenly path. You will never pluck the Rose of Sharon, if you are afraid of being pricked with the thorns which surround it. You will never reach the crown, if you flinch from the cross in the way to it. Oh! think of the honour of bearing this cross. It is conformity to the Son of God. Let the mind be deeply imbued with the remembrance of his daily cross of suffering and reproach; and we shall gladly "*go forth without the camp, bearing his reproach,*" and even "*rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame*" ² with him and for him. Indeed what love do we profess to bear him, if we will not take up a cross for him? How can we be his followers without his cross? ³ How can we be Christians, if we are not confessors of Christ before a world that despises his Gospel?

But a steady consistent profession is no matter of course. The crown is not easily won. "*Many are our persecutors and our enemies.*" Persecution to the false professor is an occasion of apostacy; ⁴ to the faithful servant of Christ, it is the trial of his faith, ⁵ the source of his richest consolations, ⁶ the guard of his profession, ⁷ and the strength of his perseverance. ⁸ It drives him to his God. He casts himself upon his Saviour for immediate refuge and support; and, in

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 7.

² Heb. xiii. 13. Acts v. 41.

³ See Matthew xvi. 24.

⁴ See Matthew xiii. 20, 21.

⁵ 1 Peter i. 6, 7.

⁶ Matthew v. 10—12. Acts xiii. 50—52. 1 Peter iv. 12, 16.

⁷ Matthew x. 16. Phil. ii. 14—16.

⁸ Acts xx. 22—24.

the exercise of his confidence, he can say—“*Yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.*” Thus was the great Apostle—at the time when his “*persecutors were many,*” and human help even from his friends had failed him, enabled to maintain an unshaken confidence in the service of his God. “*At my first answer*”—he tells us—“*no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.*”¹ David himself often acknowledged the same principle of perseverance under similar circumstances of trial. “*Lord, how are they, increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be, which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But, Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of my head. O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.*”²

But have we never taken a devious path in “*declining from the Lord's testimonies,*” to escape the appointed cross? Do we never shrink from “*the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth, by reason of the enemy and the avenger?*” Can we always in the integrity of our heart appeal to an Omniscient God—“*All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant: our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death?*”³ This profession is not the foolish confidence of boasting; but the fulfilment of the covenant promise—“*I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.*”⁴ So beautifully does the promise

¹ 2 Timothy iv. 16, 17.

² Psalm iii. 1—3; cxl. 7.

³ Psalm xliv. 16—19.

⁴ Jer. xxxii. 40.

of perseverance connect itself with the duty of persevering! And so clearly in this, as in every other way, does “the wrath of man” (“howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so”) praise God!¹ How glorious is the display of the power of his grace, in the constancy of his people! like the rocks in the ocean, immovable amidst the fury of the waves; like the trees of the forest—“rooted and established” by every shaking of the tempest! Must not the world, in witnessing the total defeat of their enmity against the Lord’s people (or rather its eventual results in their increased prosperity), be constrained to confess to the honour of God—“*Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel—What hath God wrought!*”²

158. *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.*

WE shall not tire in listening to this repeated expression³ of the Psalmist’s tenderness for the honour of God. No trouble from his “*many persecutors and enemies*” came so near his heart as the sight of the dishonour and contempt of God’s word. The glory of God was dearer to him than life. Oh! that every recollection of this tried servant of God might deepen this mark of the Lord’s peculiar acceptance upon our too cold and indifferent hearts!⁴ Our joys and sorrows are the pulse of our spiritual state. A fellowship with the joys of the angels of God over repenting

¹ Compare Isaiah x. 7, with Psalm lxxvi. 10.

² Numbers xxiii. 23.

³ Compare verses 53, 136.

⁴ See Ezekiel ix. 4—6.

sinner¹ will be accompanied with bitterness of godly sorrow over the hardness and impenitency of those who “*keep not the word of God.*”

But even here we need much and earnest prayer in order to obtain a clear and well-digested acquaintance with the real springs and motives of our conduct and profession. Sin is so subtle in its nature and workings, that it insinuates itself into our holiest desires, and often so far interweaves itself into the graces of the Spirit, as greatly to mar their beauty, and obstruct their operations. How often is zeal for the honour of God mingled with the unhallowed fire of our own spirit!² True zeal is indeed a precious fruit of the Spirit, whose other name is love—active, self-denying, compassionate love for sinners. ‘*Let me never fancy I have zeal*’—said a Christian of a very high order—‘*till my heart overflows with love to every man living.*’³ If then we are really under the influence of holy zeal and love, we shall lose no opportunity of active exertions on behalf of wretched “*transgressors;*” and the limits of our zeal will be only the limits of a fallen world. Especially within our own sphere will labour and pains be employed to stem the tide of unrighteousness—“*saying unto the fools—Deal not foolishly—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?*”⁴

But the fervency of zeal will express itself in something more difficult than personal service. We can often warn transgressors, and labour in their cause, when we are sinfully backward in sending up sighs and cries on their behalf; and in presenting these poor

¹ Luke xv. 10.

² See Luke ix. 54, 55.

³ Martyn's Life, p. 192.

⁴ Psalm lxxv. 4. Proverbs i. 22. Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

lepers by faith to that great and good Physician whose "power present to heal"¹ has been so abundantly manifested. This is indeed zeal of rare attainment through our own unbelief; but it brings its own rich blessing to the soul; because it is the zeal and the mind of the compassionate Jesus; who—though he looked round on sinners with anger, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts"²—did not forget to plead on their behalf—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."³ It was the zeal and love of him—who so identified his Father's interest with his own, that he endured the reproaches cast upon him in his bosom.⁴ And should not the members feel when the Head is wounded? Should not we consider every dishonour done to Jesus as a shaft piercing our own breast? Can we bear to "behold" all around us united in a conspiracy against the honour, and—if it were possible—against the life, of our dearest friend and benefactor, and not be painfully "grieved?"⁵ Yet genuine "grief" must begin with our own hearts—all of us mourning, every one for his iniquity."⁶ The wickedness of others will stir up the conviction within our own consciences—"I do remember my faults this day."⁷ And when once we begin the enumeration, where shall we end? "*Who can understand his errors! Cleanse thou me from secret faults?*" "*Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord.*"⁸

¹ Luke v. 17.² Mark iii. 5.³ Luke xxiii. 34.⁴ Psalm lxix. 9, 20, with Romans xv. 3.

⁵ Celerinus, in Cyprian's Epistles, acquaints a friend with his great grief for the apostacy of a woman through fear of persecution, which afflicted him so much, that at the feast of Easter (the queen of feasts in the primitive church) he wept night and day, and resolved never to know a moment's delight, till through the mercy of God she should be recovered.

⁶ Ezekiel vii. 16.⁷ Genesis xli. 9.⁸ Psalm xix. 12; cxliii. 2.

159. *Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy loving-kindness.*

“*Love for the precepts*” such as is delineated throughout this Psalm—is a distinguishing characteristic of a child of God. “*The transgressors*” neither “*love the precepts*” nor desire “*quickenings*” grace to keep them. Not that they are “*grievous*”¹ in themselves, but only too strict, too humbling for the unrenewed, proud worldly heart.² Love therefore to them—not being the growth of the natural man—must be “*a plant which our heavenly Father hath planted*”—a witness of the spirit of adoption, and an encouragement to approach to God with filial confidence. And how encouraging to the timid Christian is the recollection of the Lord’s readiness to “*consider how he loves his precepts!*” Thus did he “*consider*” Abraham—“*I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*”³ Thus also did he challenge “*the accuser of the brethren,*” respecting his servant Job—“*Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*”⁴

But while believers may enjoy the full confidence of the Lord’s *consideration* of them as “*loving his precepts*”—the consciousness of the imperfection and scanty measure of their love will always prevent them from urging it as the ground of their acceptance. Christian! you know not—or at least you allow

¹ 1 John v. 3.

² Compare Jer. vi. 10.

³ Genesis xviii. 19.

⁴ Job i. 8.

not—the proud boast—“ God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.”¹ No rather—your constant cry to the end is—“ *Quicken me*”—Your plea is not merit—but mercy—“ *according to thy loving kindness.*” You know you do not deserve to be helped, *because you love the precepts:*” but you desire and trust to be helped, *because of the “free loving-kindness” of your God.* And what must be the *kindness—the loving-kindness* of a God of infinite love! Only do not sit still, and wait for the breezes of his love. Rather call to the “ north wind to awake, and to the south wind to blow,”² to fill your sails, and urge you on. You can say indeed, that God—his word, his works, his perfections, his holiness; Jesus—his pity, his love, his grace—is your delight, your chief delight; yet how infinitely is it below the scriptural standard of privilege, attainment, and expectation!

Under the painful influence of straitened desires and heartless affections, how refreshing is it to mark the springs of life flowing from “ *the loving-kindness of the Lord!*” Blessed Jesus! we plead thy promise to *be filled.*³ We have life from thee; but give it us “ *more abundantly*”⁴—as much as these houses of clay—as much as these earthen vessels—can contain. Our taste of thy love, and our knowledge of its unbounded fulness—encourages our plea to ask thee still for more. “ *Quicken us according to thy loving-kindness.*” Often as the Psalmist had repeated his prayer for quickening grace,⁵ it was not a “ *vain repetition,*”⁶ or an empty sound. Each time was it enlivened with faith, feeling of necessity, and ardent affection; and

¹ Luke xviii. 11.

³ Matthew v. 6.

⁵ Nine times is this petition urged, verses 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, 159.

² Canticles iv. 16.

⁴ John x. 10.

⁶ Compare Matthew vi. 7.

if, in the consciousness of our weakness and coldness of heart, we should offer it an hundred times a day in this spirit, it would never fail of acceptance.

160. *Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*

THE “*loving kindness and the truth of God*” were two heavenly notes, on which “the sweet Psalmist of Israel” loved to dwell;¹ his “*loving-kindness*” in giving, and his “*truth*” in fulfilling—his gracious promises. Indeed the displays of his truth—whether to his Church collectively, or to his people individually—have always been every way worthy of himself. Often has his word seemed on the eve of being falsified, clearly with the design of a brighter and more striking display of its faithfulness. The very night previous to the close of the four hundred and thirty years, Israel was to all human appearances, as far from deliverance as at any former period. But “the vision was for an appointed time:”² nothing could hasten, nothing could delay it; for “*it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.*”³ At a subsequent period of their history, the family of David appeared upon the point of extinction, and as if the promise of God would fall to the ground:

¹ See his character described—“*Good and upright is the Lord,*” Psalm xxv. 8—and mark these perfections pleaded in their combined connexion with his purposes of grace—“*Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham*”—“*mercy*” in the original grant—*truth* in the subsequent ratification and performance. Micah vii. 20. Compare Luke i. 72, 73.

² Habakkuk ii. 3.

³ Exodus xii. 41.

but to exhibit "*the word of God*"¹ as true from the beginning," a providential, and almost a miraculous, interference was manifested. When Athaliah destroyed all the seed-royal of the house of Judah, Joash was stolen away, put under a nurse, hid from Athaliah in the house of the Lord six years, and in God's appointed time brought forth to the people, as the fulfilment of the express promise of God—"Behold the king's son shall reign, as the Lord hath said of the sons of David."² "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."³

And thus is it in the experience of his own people. Not one of them will be found, who, though tempted in seasons of despondency to "charge God foolishly,"⁴ has not afterwards, in some unexpected deliverance, been led to set to his seal—"Thy word is true from the beginning." "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left."⁵ And how do these recollections put to shame the suggestions of unbelief, and strengthen our confidence in the prospect, or even in the present endurance, of "manifold temptations!"

The full acknowledgment of the truths of God's word is the ground of all our peace and comfort—upon the simple declaration of God *received by faith*, we have an open and free access to the Saviour of sinners; we stand before God self-condemned; and yet believe that "there is no condemnation;"⁶ we have "the Spirit bearing witness" to and "with our

¹ Compare 2 Samuel vii. 16.

² 2 Chron. xxii. 10—12; xxiii. 3.

³ Psalm cvii. 43.

⁴ Job i. 22.

⁵ Deut. xxxii. 36. Compare 2 Kings xiv. 26, 27.

⁶ Romans iii. 1.

spirits,"¹ that "this God is our God, for ever and ever"—unto death—in death—and through eternity. In this simplicity of rest upon the testimony of God, we go to our God, like Abraham, in sensible hopelessness, but in assured confidence, "strong in faith, giving glory to God."²

Many however feel it hard to acknowledge the truth of God's word. They have been used to indulge the pride of their own reasonings, and they scarcely know how to read the book of God without cavilling. If they believe while it is in their hands, their confidence continually wavers, and they are not ready or prepared to give a reason of their faith. Satan has doubtless much power to hinder the establishment of their faith. Let them not venture into conflict with him with armour that they have not proved. Let them pray for a teachable simplicity of faith, by which they may receive the Divine testimony—not asking—"What thinkest thou?"—but "*How readest thou?*" In this spirit—the further they advance, the clearer will be their light, and the more assured their faith; and if at any time they should be again "tossed with the tempest, they will look to him, who stilleth the storm, and there shall be "*a great calm.*"³ Confidence simply built upon the word of God will endure the storm of earth and hell.

Yet it is possible to have an outward conviction of the truth of the word, sufficient to confute the infidel or the sceptic; and to be utterly ignorant of the experimental comfort of its truth. But to find, that "it is all true" (as the woman of Samaria found of the doctrine of Christ⁴)—because it answers to our convictions, our wants, and our feelings—to know that the promises are true, because they have been fulfilled in us—this is

¹ Romans iii. 16.

³ Mark iv. 39.

² Ibid. iv. 19, 20.

⁴ John iv. 29.

tasting, feeling, handling—this is indeed blessedness—this makes the word unspeakably precious to us—“a treasure to be desired.”¹ To have the witness in our own experience, that “we have not followed cunningly-devised fables;” but that it is “a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”²—this indeed is “life from the dead.” Oh! how should we seek to attain this experimental perception of the truth of God’s word! The Israelites were not satisfied with inquiring respecting the manna—“What is this?”³—or with discovering that it had descended from heaven; but they gathered it each for himself, and fed upon it as their daily bread. Nor will it be of any avail to us to prove beyond contradiction, and to acknowledge with the fullest assurance, the truth of God’s word, unless we thus embrace it, and live upon it as our heavenly portion. It is faith alone that can give this spiritual apprehension—“*He that believeth hath the witness in himself.*”⁴—But if the word be the truth of God “*from the beginning,*” it must be eternal truth in its character and its results—like its Great Author, in every particular—“*enduring for ever.*”—“*For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven, Thy faithfulness is unto all generations.*”⁵

Lord! give unto us that “precious faith,” which makes the acknowledgment of the “*truth of thy word from the beginning,*” and its “*endurance for ever,*” the spring of continual life and consolation to our souls.

¹ Proverbs xxi. 20.

² 1 Timothy i. 15.

³ Exodus xvi. 15, margin.

⁴ 1 John v. 10.

⁵ Verses 89, 90.

PART XXI.

161. *Princes have persecuted me without a cause ; but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.*

SUCH was David's unjust treatment from the hands of Saul ¹—*persecuted* only from envy at his superior excellence ; ² provoked by repeated and unmerited aggravations ; and only restrained from unlawful violence by his "*heart standing in awe of God's word!*" "The Lord forbid"—said he on one of these occasions—"that I should do this thing unto my master, *the Lord's anointed*, to stretch forth my hand against him, *seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.*" ³ This godly fear has always marked the people of God. Witness Joseph ⁴—Moses ⁵—Nehemiah,⁶—and the Jews ⁷—and the three Babylonish captives.⁸ Josiah also obtained a special mark of acceptance.⁹ For the man "*that trembleth at God's word,*" whether he be found on the throne or on the dunghill, is the man, "to whom the Lord will look."¹⁰ And certainly under such circumstances as David's—where the wrath of *princes* and the wrath of God are weighed against each other—who can doubt, but that it is better to incur the persecution of men by a decided adherence to the word of God, than the wrath of God, by declining from it ?

¹ Verse 23.

² 1 Sam. xviii. 8, 28, 29. Compare Dan. vi. 4, 5. Prov. xxvii. 4.

³ 1 Samuel xxiv. 6.

⁴ Genesis xxxix. 9.

⁵ Hebrews xi. 27.

⁶ Nehemiah v. 15.

⁷ Ezra ix. 4 ; x. 3.

⁸ Daniel iii. 16—18.

⁹ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 26, 27.

¹⁰ Isaiah lxvi. 2.

Our Saviour, "knowing what was in man," had clearly warned and armed his disciples against these difficulties. "When they bring you into the synagogues, and unto magistrates and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."¹ The trial at the first onset proved too hard for them: Peter's "*heart stood in awe*" of the "*persecuting princes*," and in a moment of temptation he disowned his master:² but when "the Spirit of power,"³ was poured from on high, such was the "*holy awe*," in which himself and his companions "*stood of God's word*," that they declared in the face of the whole council—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. We ought to obey God rather than men."⁴ 'I fear God'—Colonel Gardiner used to say,—'and I have none else to fear.'

Indeed, the spirit of adoption—the Christian's distinguishing character and privilege—produces an awe of God—a dread of sinning against the tenderest Father, of grieving the dearest Friend. And this *awe* of God will naturally extend to *his word*: so that we shall be more tenderly afraid of disregarding its dictates, than the most faithful subject of breaking the law of his beloved Sovereign. There is nothing slavish or legal in this fear. It belongs equally to the freedom and the holiness, of the Gospel. It is the very soul of religion; the best preservative of our joys and privileges, and the best evidence of their Scriptural character. We shall find with David this principle of special service in times of persecu-

¹ Luke xii. 11, 12.

² 2 Timothy i. 7.

² Matt. xxvi. 69—75.

⁴ Acts iv. 19; v. 29.

tion—to make us proof alike against the richest allurements, or the most powerful reproach of men, to go “beyond the word of the Lord to do less or more.”¹

But what must be the state of that heart, where the word of the great God—the Creator and Judge of the earth—fails to command reverence! Could the sinner hear a voice from heaven, addressed distinctly to himself, we can hardly conceive of obstinacy or infatuation bold enough to reject it: yet “we have a more sure word, whereunto we do well that we take heed;² to receive it with silent *awe*, to bow before it with the most unlimited subjection, and to yield ourselves entirely to its holy influence. Let us then cherish an “*awe of this word* ;” and beware of receiving it as a common book; “as the word of man,” and not, as it is in truth, the word of God.”³ If it does not stand infinitely higher in our estimation than all—even the best—books of man, we have no just perception of its value, nor can we expect any communication of its treasures to our hearts. The holiness of God is stamped upon its every sentence.⁴ Let us cultivate the spirit of Cornelius and his company in our regard for its important message—“Now therefore are we all here

¹ Numb. xxii. 18.

² 2 Peter i. 19.

³ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

⁴ The Jews' frontispiece to their great Bible is Jacob's expression of fear and astonishment upon his vision of God at Bethel—“How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” “So ought we,”—as Dr. Owen remarks upon this—“to look upon the word with a holy awe and reverence of the presence of God in it.”

* I would advise you all, that come to the reading or hearing of this book, which is the word of God, the most precious jewel, and most holy relic that remaineth upon earth, that ye bring with you the fear of God, and that ye do it with all due reverence, and use your knowledge thereof, not to vain glory of frivolous disputation, but to the honour of God, increase of virtue, and edification both of yourselves and others.’ Cranmer's Judgment of Scripture, p. 20.

present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." ¹

162. *I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.*

THE "awe" in which we should "*stand of God's word,*" so far from hindering our delight in it, is, as we have just hinted, the most suitable preparation for its most happy enjoyment. In receiving every word of it as the condescending message from him, before whom angels veil their faces, we shall be led to "*rejoice at it, as those that find great spoil.*" Often had David found "*great spoil*" as the fruit of his victories; ² but greater joy had he never found in his richest *spoil*, than he had now discovered in the word of God. By this figure the joy of the world at the advent of Christ is illustrated—"They joy before thee—as men rejoice, when they divide the *spoil.*" ³ The expression therefore was evidently intended to convey no common degree of delight. If then the saints of old could so largely enrich their souls from the scanty portion of the word; can we, who are favoured with the entire revelation of God, forbear to acknowledge—"the lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, we have a godly heritage?" ⁴

This expressive image may remind us, that *the spoils of this precious word* are not to be gained without conflict: Here "the kingdom of heaven suffereth

¹ Acts x. 33. On this particular a hint from a heathen may not be unworthy of our remark. "Ehud said to Eglon, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat." Judges iii. 20.

² At Ziglâg—1 Samuel xxx. 19, 26—31. From the children of Ammon, 2 Samuel xii. 30.

³ Isaiah ix. 3.

⁴ Psalm xvi. 6.

violence." Our natural taste and temper revolts from *the word*. Our indolence indisposes for the necessary habitual effort of prayer, self-denial, and faith. But still "the violent *do take* the kingdom by force."¹ No pains are lost—no struggle is ineffectual. The "good soldier of Jesus Christ" is abundantly recompensed for the "endurance of his hardness." He divides *great spoil*, as the fruit of his persevering conflict, and he *rejoices in it*. Sometimes indeed (as in the Syrian camp²) we *find the spoil* unexpectedly. Sometimes we see the riches and treasures contained in a passage or doctrine, long before we can make it our own. And when we gird ourselves to the conflict, paralyzed by the weakness of our spiritual perceptions and the dower of unbelief; many a prayer, and many a sigh is set up for Divine aid, before we are crowned with victory, and as the fruit of our conquest, joyfully appropriate the word to our present need and distress.

It is evident, however, that from a cursory, superficial reading of the word of God, no such fruit can be anticipated. When therefore the flesh or the world have deadened our delight in the word of God, and taken from us this "*great spoil*," should we not arm ourselves for a repossession of it? Should we be unaffected by our loss? Oh, then, since there are such treasures found and enjoyed in this field of conflict, let us not lose our interest in them by the indulgence of presumption, heartlessness, or despondency. Before we attempt to read, let us put up an earnest prayer, under the sense of utter helplessness to perform one spiritual act, for the powerful help and Almighty teaching of the Spirit of God. Then we shall persevere with

¹ Matthew xi. 12.

² 2 Kings vii. 8.

unconquerable and unwearied vigour, and not fail to share in the blessed spoil of victory, views of a Saviour's dying love—an interest in the precious blessings of the cross—“*great spoil*”—“*unsearchable riches.*”¹

163. *I hate and abhor lying; but thy law do I love.*

WE can neither “*stand in awe of God's word,*” nor “*rejoice at it,*” unless we abhor all the contrary ways of our own hearts and of the world. And here lies the spiritual conflict. For so opposed are our natural affections to the character and will of God, that we love what God hates, and we hate what God loves. Our new principle and bias, however, as directly falls in with the dictates of God's law, as before we had revolted from it. “*Lying*” is now “*hated and abhorred*” as contrary to “*a God of truth;*” and the “*law*” is now “*loved*” as the reflection of his image, and the manifestation of his will. David had before prayed to have “*lying ways removed from him,*” and a love for the law of God imparted.² His utter detestation shews, that these *ways had been removed*, and a renewed *inclination to the law* given to him.

To have *avoided “lying,”* and to have *practised the law,* might have been sufficient for the regulation of his outward conduct. But *his* was the religion of the heart—not meant only to controul his actions; but to renew his habits, motions, tempers, and taste. It was not therefore enough for him to *refrain* from lying or even to manifest a *disinclination to it*—he must “*hate and abhor*”³ it. Nor was *external conformity* or even

¹ Ephesians iii. 8.

² See verse 29.

³ Under this “*hated and abhorred lying*” he intended to include—not only those more or less direct deviations from truth, of which he

a *general interest* in the law, his standard; he must “*love*” and *delight in it*. If sin was counted common, fashionable, venial, profitable, or pleasant; if reproach and contempt were cast upon the law of God—this stopped him not. Every sin—if it was only a hair’s breath deviation from the rule—was in his eyes hateful, defiling, damning. He would “*resist unto blood*, striving against it.”¹ Every act, desire, and habit of conformity, with whatever shame it might be attended, was his joy and delight. Such—Christian—should be our standard. Lord! humble us in the daily sense of deviation and defect. Vouchsafe to us larger desires, advancing conformity to thy perfect rule.

Well had it been for Eve and for her children, had she turned from the tempter’s lie with this strong determination.² But—“*Ye shall not surely die*”—has from that fatal moment been a most effectual instrument in captivating unwary souls. So plausible is it in itself, so agreeable to our natural desires and inclinations, that it is readily cherished, even where the first contact with temptation assures the wretched victims, that its “*deceit is falsehood*.” But they do not “*hate and abhor it* :” they do not flee from it, as a concern for the honour of God and their own safety would lead them; and therefore justly are they “*given up to believe it*,”³ as the fruit of their delusion, and the punishment of their unfaithfulness. Oh! if we are ever tempted by the flattery and allurements of the world, let us only mark the opposition of their standard, taste, maxims, and pursuits to the truth of

had himself been guilty (with Abimelech, 1 Samuel xxi. 2.—twice with Achish, 1 Sam. xxi. 13: xxvii. 10.) but, as we before remarked, whatever in any shape, or form, or degree, is inconsistent with the truth of God. Compare on verse 29.

¹ Heb. xii. 4.

² Gen. iii. 4—6.

³ 2 Thess. ii. 11.

God, and we shall probably turn away with *hatred and abhorrence*.

The "overseers of the purchased flock"¹ of Christ—yea, all "who earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints"²—will anxiously watch any deterioration of doctrine or principle—any deviation from the simplicity of the gospel, and brand it as a lie. "I have not written unto you"—said the venerable Apostle—"because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?"³ And how will the Christian instantly abhor the licentious abuse of the doctrines of grace as the suggestion of the Father of lies!—"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!"⁴

After all however—it is very important to take this verse as expressing an *abhorrence* of the literal sin of *lying* in all its forms. A lie is so gross a sin, that Christians are perhaps disposed to spiritualize this expression, rather than to analyze some of the plausible shapes, in which the sin may be detected in their own profession. Exaggeration—a false gloss—a slight deviation (hardly perceptible) from the straight course—excuses for faults made to one another, which we dared not make to God—want of accuracy in relating what we hear—all these are forms of *lying* to be shunned, *hated and abhorred* by the man, who is really "walking in the light, and having fellowship with God,"⁵ as much as the more palpable falsehoods, with which the world abounds, which it excuses, and even boasts of.

¹ Acts xx. 28.

² Jude iii.

³ 1 John ii. 21, 22.

⁴ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

⁵ 1 John i. 5—7.

Believer! would you have your *hatred and abhorrence* of every kind of *lying* yet further deepened? Would you summon every passion of the soul—"indignation, vehement desire, zeal, revenge"¹—against it? Then learn to "*abhor*" it, not only as *your* enemy, but as God's.² Pray that the arrow of conviction may be dipped in the blood of Christ; and then, however deep and painful be the wound, it cannot be mortal. Mortal indeed it will be to the sin, but healing to the soul. Pray that your sorrow for sin may be soothed by a sense of reconciliation; for never will your hatred of it be so perfect, as when you feel yourself sheltered from its everlasting curse.³ To lie before your Saviour as one of his redeemed people, and to wash his feet with your tears of contrition, will be your highest and happiest privilege on this side heaven. In this spirit and daily posture you will most clearly manifest the inseparable connexion of a *hatred of lying vanities and lying ways with a love for the law of God.*

164. *Seven times a-day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments.*

DAVID had just spoken of his fear, joy, hatred, and love. He now speaks of the expression of his love in praise. And indeed it is the mixture of praise with prayer, that makes this psalm so complete an exhibition of Christian experience. Early and late, and habitually throughout the day, have we seen this man of God "*give himself to prayer.*"⁴ And here, it appears, that his "spirit of suppli-

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 11.

² Compare Psalm cxxxix. 21, 22.

³ Compare Ezekiel xvi. 63; xxxvi. 31; xx. 43.

⁴ See on verses 147, 148.

cation," in strict conformity with the Apostolical rule, was invariably mingled "*with thanksgiving.*"¹ —"*Seven times² a-day do I praise thee. If we feel it "good for us to draw near to God,"³ it will be as needless to define the frequency of our praises, as to prescribe a limitation to our visits to a beloved friend, to whom our obligations were daily increasing. Love is an excellent casuist, and will answer all the multiplied scruples, which entangle those who serve the Lord only by constraint. Young Christians indeed may sometimes unwarily bring themselves into "bondage," in forcing their consciences to a frequency of set times for duty, which may entrench either upon the circumstances of the outward man, or the weakness of the inward man. Though we must not measure our rule of service by our indolence, yet it should be accommodated to those legitimate daily engagements, which, when "done as to the Lord,"⁴ form as real and necessary a part of our religion, as the more spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. If any particular time (beyond the Sabbath, and "the morning and evening sacrifice") is observed, because it is the time—however wearied our spirits may be, or however the occasion may interfere with immediate duty; we have forgotten the weighty instruction of one well-qualified to speak—"Bodily exercise profiteth little;"⁵ and we must "go and learn what that meaneth—I will have mercy and not sacrifice."⁶ Growth in grace will however bring with it an habitual relish for spiritual intercourse with God, and will enable the young Christian to bring the*

¹ Compare Philippians iv. 6.

² Seven times—that is—continually. Proverbs xxiv. 16.

³ Psalm lxxiii. 28.

⁴ Col. iii. 23. Ephes. vi. 7.

⁵ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

⁶ Hosea vi. 6, with Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7.

spirit of this intercourse into the general mould of his profession: and thus will each duty of the day find its proper place. As his views become more solid and settled, his services will become more free, and his obedience more evangelical.

But the formalist—considering “*seven times a-day*,” to be an infringement of the sacred canon—“*Be not righteous overmuch*”¹—prays his customary service twice a-day. He says his prayers, and he says his praises too, and his conscience slumbers again. And alas! there are times of slumber with the Christian, when he little differs from him. Oh! let us be alarmed at every symptom of such a state, and “find no rest to our spirit,” until we have regained some measure of this frame of hearty and overflowing praise. If there be a heavenly nature, there must be a heavenly work. Tongue and heart should be set on fire by love. Thus we will go to our work—whatever it may be—and sing at it.

But the Christian sometimes feels that he has no heart, and he almost fears, no right to praise. He has no sensible token of love to call him forth: and therefore he suffers his harp to “hang upon the willows;” nor does he care to take it down, even to “sing one of the Lord’s songs in this strange land.”² Let him remember that the service of praise is the most successful means of resistance to the despondency of unbelief. Many have found with Bunyan—‘When I believe and sing, my doubting ceases.’ Often has the act or even the attempt to praise overcome dulness in prayer. Endeavour, therefore, to bring to mind some of your spiritual or even temporal mercies. Or, if recollection fails you, open

¹ Ecces. vii. 16.

² Psalm cxxxvii. 2, 4.

your Bible; turn to some subject of praise, such as the song of the Angels at the birth of our Saviour,¹ or the song of the Redeemed to the honour of the Lamb,² Have you no part or interest in it? Do you not need the Saviour? Can you be happy without him? Then enquire, and feel, and try, whether you cannot give “thanks unto God for his unspeakable gift.”³ Peradventure your notes may rise into praise, and in the excitement of praise, prayer will again mingle itself with its wonted enjoyment. It is no less your folly than your sin to yield to that continual depression, which unfits you for the exercise of your duties and your privileges. How fully do our Liturgical services provide assistance to elevate and to sustain the elevation of the soul heavenwards! Language better adapted for strengthening the feeble aspiration of the soul will not readily be found; consecrated as it is in the remembrance of its acceptable use by a throng of the Lord’s favoured people during successive generations, now united to the general assembly above, and worshipping with everlasting acceptance “before the throne of God and the Lamb.”

The Lord’s “*righteous judgments*”—his decrees and declarations respecting his Church—were the main subject of the Psalmist’s praise. They occupied his “midnight,”⁴ as well as his daily song; and often since have they called forth the expression of adoring thankfulness—“*O Lord, thou art my God*”—said the enraptured prophet in the name of the Church—“*I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things: thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.*”⁵ Inscrutable indeed they may sometimes appear; and opposed to our best prospects of

¹ Luke ii. 13, 14.

² Rev. v. 12.

³ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

⁴ Verse 62.

⁵ Isaiah xxv. 1.

happiness; yet the language of faith in the darkest hour will be—"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."¹ But neither "*seven times a-day*," nor "seventy times seven," will satisfy us in heaven. Then our song—even "the song of Moses and the Lamb—will still be—the "Lord's *righteous judgments*;"² and for this ever "new song" the harps of God will never be unstrung, and never out of tune, throughout an eternity of praise.³ But a moment, and we shall be engaged in this heavenly employ—no reluctance of the spirit—no weariness of the flesh. Every moment is hastening on this near—this cheering—this overwhelming glorious—prospect. Blessed be God!

165. *Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.*

EVERY feature of the covenant of grace bears some resemblance to the nature of the covenant, full of grace, peace, and love. Two of the agents in the covenant are fitly represented by the lamb and the dove—emblems of peace. The tendency of its principles "is first pure, then peaceable."⁴ The end of it will be peace—universal peace; "*They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.*"⁵ The present enjoyment of it is peace—"great peace"—the heritage of those, "*which love the law of God.*"

Christian! Have you not discovered the connexion of *peace with love for the law*—the whole revealed will of God? Looking at it as *the law of truth*—was not its disturbance of your peace of self-satisfaction

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

² Rev. xv. 3, 4.

³ Ibid. iv. 8.

⁴ James iii. 17.

⁵ Isaiah xi. 6—9. Compare ii. 4.

and self-delusion the first step to the attainment of solid peace? You learned to see yourself as God sees you. Every fresh view humbled you more deeply. Your dissatisfaction exercised you in an anxious and diligent search for true peace. And then, looking at it again as "*the law of faith*"—here is your ground of peace laid open. Your way to God is clear—your acceptance free—your confidence assured your communion heavenly. "Being justified by faith, you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" yea—you are "filled with peace, *all peace in believing.*"¹ And have you not equal reason to "*love this law*" as a *law of obedience*? Here you have your question answered—"Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?"² Let "this word dwell in you richly in all wisdom;" and it will be your daily directory of life and conduct. You will have a taste to "delight in it after the inner man."³ Walking in the light of it, you will go on to the full enjoyment of *peace*. "Taking" cheerfully your Saviour's "yoke upon you, and learning of him, you will" ever "find rest unto your soul." "All his paths are peace."⁴

Professor! what do you lose by your indulged indifference to *the law of God*? Does not your own conscience tell you, that you are a stranger to this peace—this "*great peace*?" A secret root of idolatry cankers the principles of peace. Notions will not bring it to you. Nothing but vital godliness—the "*love for God's law*"—"the truth received in the love of it"—will realize the blessing.

Young Christian! be not disheartened, though your "*love to the law*" be so weak, interrupted,

¹ Romans v. 1, 10, 11; xv. 13.

² Acts ix. 6.

³ Romans vii. 22.

⁴ Matt. xi. 29. Prov. iii. 17.

clouded, that sometimes you fear, that you have no love at all. Do you not mourn over the coldness of your love? do you not desire to love? Seek to know more of the constraining influence of the love of Christ. If your chariot wheels now, like those of the Egyptians, drive heavily; you will then move, like the chariots in the prophet's vision, "upon wheels and upon wings."¹ At least you are on the way to peace; it cannot be far off. Stir up then the habit of diligent faith; be active—be more earnest in dependence on the Lord. Soon will he visit you with his cheering sunshine, and bless you with his heavenly *peace*.² "The Lord is your shepherd;" and, dwelling near the shepherd's tent, "you shall not want."³ Nothing comes to you without his appointment; and whatever he takes away was only what he had first given, and leaves you nothing but to say—"Blessed be the name of the Lord."⁴ Whatever he lays upon you is infinitely less than you deserve, and with the Fatherly design "to do you good at the latter end."⁵ Whatever he gives you is peace—"great peace"—"perfect peace;"⁶ and though at best, *as to its actual and perceptible enjoyment*, it is only a chequered gift; yet as the earnest of that "peace, into which the righteous shall enter, when taken away from the evil to come"⁷—it is an incalculable blessing.

The stedfastness of our profession is a most important fruit of this blessing of peace—"Nothing shall offend them." The daily cross,⁸ the humbling doc-

¹ Compare Exodus xiv. 25, with Ezekiel i. 15, 23.

² Malachi iv. 2.

³ Psalm xxix. 11; lxxxv. 8; xxiii. 1.

⁴ Job i. 21.

⁵ Deut. viii. 16.

⁶ Isaiah xxvi. 3.

⁷ Ibid. lvii. 16.

⁸ Mark x. 21, 22.

trine,¹ the fiery trial²—which, by *offending the professor*, detect the unsoundness of his heart—these are the principles of strength and consolation to the faithful *lover of God's law*. Those who were stumbled by “tribulation or persecution,” were they who “had no root in themselves.”³ Hence, therefore, there was no love in their hearts; consequently no peace in their experience, and no stability or perseverance in their course. The frequency of such cases in a day of profession is a subject of constant and most painful observation. A course of religion, commenced under the impulse of momentary excitement, is like “a reed shaken by the wind.” The first breath of the storm beats down all resolutions, that were not formed upon the conviction of utter helplessness, and in entire dependence upon Divine grace.⁴ But genuine love will prove our safeguard *against all grounds of offence*. The Gospel has been embraced on a fair calculation of the cost, from a deep sense of its value, and from a spiritual perception of its character and application to our wants. We hear objections taken to the doctrine of the total depravity of man; but “*love to the law of God*”—moulding our minds into its heavenly impression—will remove all ground of offence. The pride of man's wisdom revolts from the doctrine of the cross, and the freeness of the grace of God. But we love it as a part of the “*law of faith*.” It suits our case. It answers our necessities—and therefore here also “*nothing offends us*.” Thus whatever be the hindrance—whether from Satan or himself—whether from the enmity of the world or the inconsistencies of the church—the believer, while he mourns over these things, he is *not offended at* them, or at the

¹ John vi. 60, 65, 66.

² Mark iv. 17.

³ Matthew xiii. 21.

⁴ Comp. John xv. 5. 2 Cor. xii. 9

Gospel through them. He has learned a more Scriptural standard, and to exercise a more discriminating judgment. "*Love to the law of God*" enables him—instead of being "tossed to and fro" in doubtful perplexity—to "make straight paths for his feet."¹ If his cross be grievous, he seeks from the Lord a quiet spirit; and thus, "in patience possessing his soul," he finds "the yoke easy, and the burden light."² His difficulties exercise and strengthen his faith, and add fresh testimony to the faithfulness of the promise. Whether therefore his way be dark or light, his soul is at peace. In the enjoyment of his Saviour's love, the witness in his own heart, that "the work of righteousness"—of "*love to the law of his God*"—"shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."³

166. *Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.*

THE experience of the "*great peace*" connected with "*the love of God's law,*" is at once the fruit of faith, and the motive of obedience. And the enjoyment of it leads the child of God to give renewed expression to his faith and devotedness to his service. "Faith, which worketh by love,⁴ is no less the characteristic of the Old, than of the New Testament church. For mark here the principle and the object of faith—"I have hoped for thy salvation"—and the practical influence of faith—I have "*done thy commandments.*" "Walked not believers always in the same spirit? Walked they not in the same steps?"

¹ Hebrews xii. 13, with Proverbs iv. 25—27.

² Luke xxi. 19. Matt. xi. 30.

³ Isaiah xxxii. 17.

⁴ Galatians v. 6.

Faith is the exercise of the soul in a sense of need, in desire, and in trust. Faith goes to God on the ground of the promise—hope in the expectation of the thing promised. Thus hope implies the operation of faith. It appropriates to itself the object of faith. The power to take hold of the promises of faith, and to stay our souls upon their “everlasting consolation, is the evidence of a good hope through grace”—such as “maketh not ashamed.” Conscious unworthiness may give a trembling feebleness to the hand of faith; but the feeblest apprehension of one of the least of the promises of the gospel assures us of our interest in them all. Why may we not set all the fulness of the covenant before the weakest as well as before the strongest believer, and proclaim to both with equal freedom the triumphant challenge—“*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? Who is he that condemneth?*”²—Every believer is alike interested in the gospel of grace. “There is no difference” in the righteousness of the gospel, which is “the righteousness of God”—nor in the imputation of it, which is “unto all and upon all—nor in the subjects,—which is them that believê—nor in the means of its application, which in all cases is “by faith of Jesus Christ”—nor in the need of the blessing—“All have sinned” without difference. All therefore are justified without difference.³ The only difference regards the strength or weakness of the faith, by which the righteousness is more or less distinctly appropriated, and its consequent blessings enjoyed. No soul however can sink into perdition, that grasps the promise of Christ with the hand of faith, be that hand ever so weak and trembling; though, if the promise did not hold us more

¹ 2 Thess. ii. 16. Rom. v. 5.

² Rom. viii. 33, 34.

³ Ibid. iii. 22, 23.

firmly by its unchangeableness, than we hold it by our faith, who could ever attain the blessing?

Not indeed that our interest in the Gospel is transient or uncertain. For though the perception of it may be often interrupted, yet is it not still in the Bible—in the covenant of God—in the heart of God? And is it not constantly renewed in the exercise of faith? The repetition of the same act of faith is therefore equally necessary every moment, as at the first moment of our spiritual life. Whatever be our standing in the gospel, faith will always realize to the end the same *hope for God's salvation* in every fresh application to Christ. Indeed the subsequent difficulty is often greatly increased from the neglect of the habitual exercise of faith. For the neglected cultivation of the habit of faith materially weakens its operation in seasons of emergency. The more therefore it is regarded as the breathing of the soul, and the more constantly it is exercised in the successive occasions of every moment's need; the less perplexity and confusion will be experienced, when some special communication of strength, or some distinct application of a promise, is required.

Now is not your experience, believer, familiar with such an illustration as this? You are exercised with wandering, defiling imaginations. You are distressed. You struggle against them, and again and again are overcome. You know the promise. You are acquainted with the remedy. But "the shield of faith" has been laid by. You have therefore to seek it, when you want it at hand for the use of the present moment; and thus you lie powerless, at a distance from the cure, instead of being able to bring your sin at once to Jesus—"Lord, this is my trouble; this is the "plague of my heart;" "but speak the word

only, and my servant shall be healed.”¹ Thus does the indolent neglect of the quickening principle of the soul, greatly impair its powerful energy, and “the confidence and rejoicing of hope”² flowing from it. “If the life in the flesh is” not “a life of faith on the Son of God,” no solid and permanent happiness can be known.

But on what ground is this “*hope for the Lord’s salvation*” built? On his faithfulness, not on our sincerity—on his promises, not on our frames—on his unchangeableness, not on our constancy.³ It is built—not on the work of grace in us, but on the work of Christ for us—a work, which has satisfied every claim, provided every security, and pledged all the Divine perfections on our behalf—a work so finished and complete, that all the difficulties of salvation on the part of God are removed, and the sinner finds no hindrance in the way *but himself*; while he is warranted, though covered with guilt and defilement, to apply for full, immediate, and unconditional forgiveness. What then hinders the instant reception of the privilege, but disbelief of the record? It is this which dares to “make God a liar;”⁴ which therefore must not, as is too often the case, be lamented as an infirmity (except indeed in cases of constitutional weakness); but watched, prayed against, and resisted, as a deep and aggravated sin. The present enjoyment of the blessing is indeed often marred by looking at *the fruits of faith* (contrition, love, diligence, &c.) as prerequisites for believing, instead of looking *to the object of faith*, to put away our sin, and to produce these fruits in us. *This* not only binds our sin upon us, but robs God of his honour; and, whilst

¹ Matt. viii. 8.

³ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

² Heb. iii. 6. 14.

⁴ 1 John v. 10.

it prevents the descent of his blessing into our souls, reflects upon His wisdom and grace, who has laid the foundation of a sinner's hope on his own dear Son,¹ irrespective of any warrant of faith in himself. We want to be enlivened with sensible comfort, *as a ground for our believing in Christ*: or, if we look for it from faith, it is from faith, *as an act* (in which respect it is no more a proper ground for comfort than any other grace); instead of looking for it *in and from him in whom we believe*. Thus we not only lose the peace and joy we are seeking; but we lose it by our mistaken way of seeking it.

The fulness of Christ, and the promises of God in him, are the only basis of a full assurance of salvation: and *this* basis is equally firm at all times, and under all circumstances. The Apostle says to believers—“*Ye are complete in him.*”² Your title is as perfect—your interest as secure, as ever it will be at the day of “*the redemption of the purchased possession.*”³ Awakened sinner! let not then, a sense of unworthiness paralyse your faith. As a guilty sinner, you are invited. As a willing sinner, you are welcome. As a believing sinner, you are assured. Why hesitate then to “lay hold on eternal life?” Is it presumption in the drowning man to attempt to swim to the rock of safety? Why then should not the sinking soul cast itself upon the “Rock of Ages?” “*Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation.*”

Believer! “Behold!” saith your Lord,—“I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” “Hold fast your confidence and the rejoicing of your hope.”⁴ This is of no trifling importance. An established confidence ought to result from,

¹ Isa. xxviii. 16.

² Col. ii. 10.

³ Eph. i. 14.

⁴ Rev. iii. 11. Heb. iii. 6.

and to bear witness to, your interest in the Lord's salvation.¹ For without it, you have no relief from the spirit of bondage; no enlargement in duties; no enjoyment of privileges: no "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Saviour;" no honoured usefulness in the Church of God: the "things which remain will be ready to die."² Rest not, then, satisfied with an occasional gleam of light and joy, while your horizon is overcast with doubts and fears. Waste not that time in heartless complaints, that would be far better employed in a vigorous habit of faith. Live above frames and feelings upon this glorious truth—*'Christ has undertaken for me.'* He lives and reigns, and pleads for every sinner that trusts in him. Exercise your dependence upon him in importunate and persevering supplications. "Give all diligence," at all times, in all ways, private and public, "instant in season and out of season." Thus "an entrance into" the joy, peace, and glory of "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour will be richly ministered unto you."³ You shall be released from the prison-house of despondency, and shall breathe the free atmosphere of adoption and heavenly love.

But remember, that this "assurance of hope," even in its weakest and lowest influence, is a practical principle, a spring of life in perpetual motion. "*I have done thy commandments.*" "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."⁴ All obedience that springs not from this source is, to say the least, of a low and legal character, the fruit of self-will, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency. Evangelical obedience can only flow from Evangelical faith and hope. Love to Christ catches fire from the perception of his love to us. Without this perception, all is weariness, toil and travail of soul in his service; duty, not privi-

¹ See Heb. iii. 6. Whose house are we—if we, &c. ib. 14.

² Rev. iii. 2.

³ 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

⁴ 1 John iii. 3.

lege; constraint, not delight; conscience, not love. Hence the most assured believers will be the most devoted servants of their master. "The joy of the Lord"—"the joy of faith," of acceptance, of communion—"is their strength."¹ They live by faith, and as they believe they love; they deny themselves; they lay themselves out for their Master's work: they conquer all that oppose their progress.

We cannot, therefore, "*do his commandments*" without "*a hope for his salvation.*" For only in proportion as we have assured our title to the promises of the Gospel, can we take hold of them, plead them, or be supported by them. When therefore our hope is indistinct, we are almost left to our own unassisted resources; and our course will probably end in "perpetual backsliding." *Active devotedness flows from assured acceptance.*² Where there is no certainty there can be little love, little delight, little diligence. Let us walk in sunshine, and we shall work cheerfully and honourably for God.³

If, then, we are ever ready either to suspect the reality of our "*hope for God's salvation,*" or to refuse its consolations; let us—to remedy this evil—keep our eye fixed on Christ *as its ground*, and on fruitfulness in good works *as its proper evidence*. Thus shall we ourselves become more established; and others, beholding in us the power of our Christian hope, will be led to say—"We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."⁴

¹ Neh. viii. 10. ² See 1 Cor. xv. 58. ³ Comp. Isa. vi. 6—8.

⁴ Zech. viii. 23. We conclude with giving a full and Scriptural view of the principles and character of Christian assurance. *That a full sense of acceptance with God grounded upon the Divine testimonies is attainable*—there can be no doubt. The "covenant ordered in all things and sure"—(2 Sam. xxiii. 5.) offers ample warrant for the most assured confidence. The promises of this covenant are full, free, multiplied; adapted to all possible diversity of cases—attested by the oath and seal of God for this declared end—"the full assurance of hope," and the "strong consolation" of his people. (Heb. vi. 11—13.)

167. *My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.*—168. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.*

THOSE only, who have *hoped in the Lord's salvation*, can take up this expression of joyful delight in his

The instructions of our Lord and his Apostles had the same blessed purpose in view. (John xv. 11; xvi. 33; 1 John v. 13.) The design and efficacy of his atonement—as contrasted with the weakness of the legal services—was, to make his people “perfect as pertaining to the conscience.” (Heb. ix. 9, with x. 14.) Under both dispensations has this sense of appropriation and conscious security been maintained. (Job xix. 25. Psalm xviii. 1. Cant. ii. 16; vii. 10. 2 Tim. i. 12. 1 John iv. 16; v. 19, 20.) Its basis is ground common to all. (Rom. viii. 35, 38, 39, with 31—34.) The want of it is evidently reformed. (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Exhortations are given to press forward to it. (Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.) *Faith*. (Eph. i. 13. Heb. vi. 17, 18.) *Obedience*. (Isa. xxxii. 17. xlvi. 17, 18. lxiv. 5. John xiv. 21—23. 1 John ii. 3—5. iii. 24.) *The fear of God*. (Psalm xxv. 14.) *Love*. (1 John iii. 14, 18—21. iv. 12.) *Diligence*. (Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 5—11.) *Perseverance*, (Hos. vi. 3.) *on our part*; *Affliction*. (Zech. xiii. 9.) *The gift of the Spirit*. (Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 24. iv. 13.) *on God's part*—are the means of its attainment. *Active devotedness*. (Isa. vi. 6—8.) *Support in temptation*, (Job xix. 21—25.) *in suffering*. (2 Tim. i. 12.) and *in the prospect of eternity*, (2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.) are its blessed results.

It is evidently, therefore, our Father's will, that his children's complete acceptance should not be with them a matter of present uncertainty. He intends—not only that they should reach heaven at last, but that heaven should commence on earth in a state of conscious security and peace—not only that *they should have eternal life, but that they should know that they have it*. (1 John v. 13.) The gospel—instead of forbidding this privilege, warrants, produces, and establishes it; for the conviction of the professor, the excitement of the slumbering, and the encouragement of the weak.

Yet we must not so identify assurance with faith, as to conclude all that are destitute of it to be unbelievers. It springs indeed from faith, and can grow upon no other root. All the practical principles connected with it are the fruits of faith. “The promise of the Spirit,” by whom the privilege is applied, “is received by faith.” (Gal. iii. 14.) The want of assurance also is in fact, a want of faith. It is the soul seeking “confidence in the flesh,” instead of “rejoicing in Christ

ways. To all besides they are bondage. To these "his service is perfect freedom." The Divine likeness upon the soul is not a distorted image. Every thing is beautiful in its place and proportion. All other graces grow in connexion with the love of the testi-

Jesus." The revolting view of its own sin, *unconnected with the covering of the atonement*, produces despondency instead of assurance. Whereas on the other hand, a clear apprehension of the doctrines of the Gospel is always a ground for the exercise of faith, and a means of establishing Christian confidence.

And yet, unless we separate between *the principle*, and *the conscious interest in the objects*, of faith, we shall, in a spirit of evangelical self-righteousness, rest our salvation—not upon faith as a means of laying hold of Christ, but upon some feeling or sensation of our own mind. Besides the Old Testament saints occasionally lost their *consciousness of the Divine favour*—that is, *their assurance* (Job xiii. 24; xix. 11. Psalm xiii. 1; xxxi. 22; lxxvii. 7—9; lxxxviii. 7, 14—16): while "the root of the matter"—*the root of faith*—was still "in them." With the disciples—while they were engrafted *by faith*, as living branches of the true vine—*the privilege of assurance was prospective*. (John xv. 1—5, with xiv. 20.) Faith as a means of salvation does not seem *necessarily* to imply an *appropriating interest in the Gospel*. (John i. 49, 50. Acts viii. 37. Rom. x. 9. 1 John v. 1.) The Apostles exhort to *assurance* those "who had obtained like precious faith with them." (2 Pet. i. 1—10.) They write to *sincere believers*, that they might be assured *believers*—plainly distinguishing between *believing unto life*, and "*knowing that we have life*," (1 John v. 13.) They separate again between *faith as the result of hearing*, and the sealing of the Spirit, i. e. *assurance—as the consequence of faith* (Eph. i. 13); as also between "*the things that are freely given to us of God*," and *our knowledge or perception of them by the Spirit of God*. (1 Cor. ii. 12.) And is our knowledge of these free gifts always distinct? Have we no part in them, till we have fully cleared up our interest in them? And does the right of the heir depend upon his consciousness of the validity of his title?—The "command" *instantly* to "believe on the name of Jesus Christ," is indeed as binding upon us all, as any part of the Decalogue. (John vi. 28, 29. 1 John iii. 23.) But as *faith is the means of obtaining forgiveness* (Acts x. 43; xiii. 38, 39; xxvi. 18.)—if it be supposed to imply a *persuasion of forgiveness*, it would involve the absurdity of believing that we are accepted, that we may be accepted. Thus forgiveness would be made to precede faith, instead of being the result of it. Again—as faith is the instrument, by which we are engrafted into Christ, (John xv. 4.) and brought into this state of acceptance, we must have *faith* before we can be in this state—consequently

monies of God. David was never tired of expressing his love. He had not "*done the commandments*" from constraint; but "*his soul kept them*"—yea—he "*loved them exceedingly.*" Indeed the bias of the new nature to "*keep the precepts*" is as prevalent

before we can *have assurance that we are in it.* Faith therefore must be supposed separable from, and antecedent to, assurance. Thus also— if assurance be correctly defined—"*knowing whom we have believed*" (2 Tim. i. 12.)—consciousness supposes the previous exercise of faith on its object—that is—faith preceding assurance.

Nor do many of the exercises of faith recorded in the Gospels exhibit distinct marks of assurance. Sense of need, desire, use of the appointed means, and a spirit of dependence mainly characterized the applicants for the Saviour's mercy—Doubts of his willingness (Matt. viii. 2, 3.) or his ability (Mark ix. 22.) often mingled themselves with the sincere workings of faith. Our Lord himself seemed to consider the centurion's case as an exception. (Matt. viii. 8—10.) Seldom did dependence amount to *certainty*; and *appropriation* was generally rather the result than the principle of the application.

"The assurance of faith"—as it properly respects *a dependence upon the record*, is indeed the essential principle of Christian life. But "*the assurance of hope*"—*a conscious interest in the record*, comprehending *the real privilege of assurance*—seem to be a distinct and separable idea. The truth of the record—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out"—may be implicitly received: yet a *consciousness of coming*, or *of having come*, may be much obscured by negligence, self-righteousness, indistinct perception of the acts of faith, or the power of unbelief in some of its various forms. Consequently there will be doubt of an interest in the record—*a want of assurance.* For the Bible is not "*the Lamb's Book of Life*"—the register of the elect of God. No man can, therefore, bring from thence a direct testimony for his personal salvation. His character—not his name—is in the record. The declaration is—"He that believeth"—*not any particular individual mentioned by name*—"shall be saved." No man is commanded in the first instance to believe that Christ died *for him individually*—*but for such as he is*—for the unworthy, the guilty, the condemned, the perishing. This is the warrant of his own application, the event of which will—*ultimately, if not immediately*—be appropriation and assurance.

We are deeply convinced, that a lowered exhibition of this precious doctrine and inestimable privilege has greatly deteriorated the standard of Evangelical religion. The objections against it are founded in ignorance or misconception. Instead of *savouring of presumption*, it is the very principle of humility. It is the reception of the divine testimony without *reasoning or disputation.* Whereas doubting may be justly

as that of the old nature to sin. Once the believer would have wished the law of God blotted out of the universe, or at least exchanged for one more indulgent to his own inclinations. But now that it is written in his heart, even its restraint is delightful to him; and

considered (to use an anomalous term) *proud humility*. For does not the doubt on account of our unworthiness, imply a secret dependence on worthiness as a ground of acceptance? Nor again, does assurance militate against the influence of godly fear—which was never meant to impair the certainty of our faith; but to guard us against carnal security and self-confidence. We work out our salvation “with fear and trembling,” upon the ground of assurance—that is, upon the appropriating confidence in God “working all our works in us.” (Phil. ii. 12, 13. Isa. xxvi. 12.) The assured hope of the Gospel is the principle—the hindrance—of godly fear. (Heb. xii. 28.) Indeed we must consider this doctrine, scripturally stated, to be the life of present privilege, and the spring of practical devotedness. Where, therefore, it is defectively set forth—or scarcely set forth at all—or guarded with an over anxious care against abuse—the privilege is but little known, and the springs of active love are weak and uncertain. And thus believers too often, in a languid and highly sinful state of unbelief, acquiesce in a feeble exercise of this vital principle, indolently yielding up all effort for a vigorous and healthy habit of faith. They go about their duties, like an expiring person about his work: agitated about the business of the moment; while the desirableness of health and strength, the Physician and the remedy, are given up in despondency. Their case is perfectly recoverable by due attention to the appointed means, and to the real nature and symptoms of their disease. Yet they sit down in the miserable and degrading conclusion, that their powers are paralyzed; and though they may preserve the notion of spiritual life, and the hope of salvation at last; yet they think they must be content to be feeble; comfortless, and unprofitable.

Much injury has also arisen from restricting the privilege of assurance to the maturity of Christian experience. Does not the Apostle place it at the very threshold of the gospel, when he wrote to “*little children—because their sins were forgiven them for Christ’s name sake*”? (1 John ii. 12.) And ought we not, after the inspired pattern, to “desire every one to give diligence,” in pressing towards this mark? (Heb. vi. 11.) Diligence—as the habit of faith—is the appointed mean; (sloth—as the fruit of unbelief—the main hindrance to its attainment. (Heb. vi. 11, 12.) It is undoubtedly the equal and common privilege of the youngest as well as the oldest member of the family of God; and (though unbelief, sloth, or backsliding may for a while preclude the enjoyment of it) it is linked to the first, as well as

as he gains a clearer intimacy with it, and a closer discernment of its spirituality, he "*loves it exceedingly.*" Not one indeed of the "*precepts or testimonies*" does he "*keep*" as he ought, and as he desires; but there is not one of them, that he does not delight in, and most anxiously desire to fulfil.

to any successive exercise of faith—to its most trembling, as well as its most collected act. (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) Indeed the first genuine act of faith is at least as strenuous as any subsequent act; and perseverance in this act, where the hand is trembling is often the characteristic of the greatest decision, courage, and maturity. All, therefore, should be exhorted to assurance; nor should the youngest be satisfied without the attainment of it. Many realize it at a very early stage of experience. And where they fall short of it, it is not from defect in the object, or in the warrant—but in the mean. The exhibition of the work of Christ is not appropriated with that simplicity, which brings with it "*joy and peace in believing.*" See Acts viii. 5, 8, 39; xvi. 34. 1 Thess. i. 6.

We cannot, however, absolutely identify faith and assurance. Adoption into the family of God "*by faith*" (Gal. iii. 26,) does not, as we conceive, depend upon, nor is it in all cases connected with *consciousness* of this relation. A child may be fully assured of his interest in the family, and title to the patrimony. But *while an infant—when his relation and interest were as complete as at any subsequent period—he had no such consciousness.* And thus many of the dear children of God have no *consciousness* that they are so; yet they cry, they long, they walk—or they try to walk—as children: and so they *crave* that they are children. Or (to use another illustration) we may have light sufficient to distinguish objects, and to guide us on our way; while yet we *do not see clearly,* and therefore *cannot possibly be conscious that we see clearly.* What judgment, we may also ask, must we form of those distressing cases of constitutional infirmity, the characteristic of which is not so much positive unbelief, (though the symptoms may present a mixture of this principle) as a want of mental power (often sudden and unaccountable,) to apprehend the objects of faith in any distinct gospel relation? They cannot be seen in their true light and bearing. The spiritual optics, though not destroyed, are greatly obscured; so that the eye of sense and natural conscience fills the retina of contemplation with its own false views. This is a very different case from spiritual indolence, or want of laboriously distinct statement—that is—where the view of the elementary materials is clear, and wants only the exercise of industry in the arrangement of them. This is the state of a person in a swoon—not of a corpse. *The principle of life is not extinct,*

Nor let our consciousness of daily failures, restrain this strong expression of confidence. The most humble believer need not hesitate to adopt it as an evidence of grace,—not as a claim of merit.”¹ David aspired to no higher character than that of a poor sinner; but he was conscious of spirituality of obedience, “*exceeding love*” to the word, and an habitual walk under the eye of his God—the evidences of a heart

though the consciousness of it is wholly wanting, and may continue so for some time.

If again, assurance be the *essential principle of faith*, then faith can never be conceived in an imperfect state, or connected with any variation of growth or declension, or of spiritual intelligence. All that are destitute of it, must also be in a state of unbelief. We have therefore to account for the strange anomaly of *unbelievers*, “knowing the plague of their own hearts,” hating sin, separate from the world, and renewed in heart, temper, life, and conduct. For such unquestionably are many, who—though kept in bondage by their doubts and fears, and far from having attained a conscious interest in Christ—are yet (upon this supposition) *bringing forth the fruits of faith upon the root of unbelief*! Is not this a stumbling to the unconverted? Is it not rather “despising” than cherishing “the day of small things”? Is it not “breaking” rather than binding up “the bruised reed?” Let us pray for faith to receive and to exhibit “the fulness of the blessing”—“the high calling,” and consequent responsibilities; *but let us not shake the “little ones” out of the camp.* Like Jacob of old—and after the pattern of a more wise and tender shepherd than he—we must “*gently lead those that are with young.*” (Gen. xxxiii. 13, 14. Isa. xl. 11.)

The Scripture seems therefore fully to warrant the distinction prevalent among the Puritan divines—that assurance is “*necessary to the Christian—for his well-being, not for his being;*” for his consolation and establishment, not for his salvation. For our own part—though we would not scruple to say, “He that *believeth not* shall be damned,” (Mark xvi. 16.)—we dare not say, “He that *is not assured* shall be damned.” There can indeed be no peace without some conscious liberty to call God our own. And to be satisfied without the exercise of freedom, is to rob God and ourselves. Yet let not the trembling soul conclude too lastly against itself, from the want of this assurance. Let him search into the grounds of his confidence. Let him appropriate the testimony in simplicity. Let him yield to it the obedience of faith; and let him not doubt, but that in the Lord’s best time and way, he will be able to record his profession of trust—*I know whom I have believed.* (2 Tim. i. 12.)

¹ Bishop Horne.

(often mentioned in the Old Testament¹) “perfect with him.”

This active love to the word should be cultivated on the principle of our public walk before God. We must not study the Scripture merely for our present gratification, or to furnish materials for our Christian intercourse. We ought rather from every step in the history of Christ, as well as from the more finished course of instruction in the Epistles—to be gathering some help to “set the Lord always before us,”²—realizing the interest that he takes in us, and his presence with us as our Father, Governor, Teacher, Comforter, Friend.

Now, let us ask—Do our “souls” thus “*keep the Lord’s testimonies*” habitually, perseveringly, practically, in the remembrance, that *all our ways are before him*? Does conscience testify that, with all our defects and sinful mixture, they are uppermost in our minds; that our love breaks through the worldly rules of expediency, prudence, or the example of those around us—(the too common measurement of scanty obedience)—as if it could never burn with sufficient fervour in his service, “who loved us, and gave himself for us”?³ Why, then, should we shrink from this acknowledgment of “simplicity and godly sincerity?” If we are ready to own—that “without Christ we can do nothing;” that his Spirit “has wrought all our works in us;”⁴ that “by the grace of God we are what we are;”⁵ that our hope of acceptance

¹ Compare ver. 1. Margin; 2 Chron. xv. 17; xvi. 9; 2 Kings xx. 3. The import of the term is limited and explained by the word “upright” united with it, Job i. 8; Psalm xxxvii. 37. The Scripture use of the word perhaps refers rather to our desires than our attainments (compare Phil. iii. 12—15); and in general seems to mark Christian maturity, as contrasted with the weakness of the babe, and the inexperience of the young man in Christ. Compare the use of the same word *τελειος* in 1 Cor. ii. 6; xiv. 20. Heb. v. 14.

² Psalm xvi. 8.

³ Gal. ii. 20.

⁴ Isa. xxvi. 12, with John xv. 5.

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

is *grounded only* upon the finished work on the cross—why should we refuse to confess the grace of God in us? Yet we must not forget, that allowed unfaithfulness in his service, neglect of secret prayer, impurity of motive, or any “iniquity regarded in the heart”—though they will not loosen the ground of our hope—will obscure the comfort of our Christian confidence. How beautiful is that princely spirit, which will not serve the Lord “of that which doth cost us nothing;”¹ that not only longs for holiness as the way to heaven; but loves heaven the better for the holy way that leads to it, and for the perfect holiness that reigns there eternally!

How important is the daily remembrance, that “*all our ways are before God!*” that every act, every thought, every desire, every word, is registered by conscience as his vicegerent, and laid up in his book of remembrance! Well would it be for us, if we walked less before men, and more “*before God;*” if in secret, in business, at home and abroad, we heard the solemn voice—“*I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect.*”² We may be unreprouable in the sight of men, while it is a mere artificial walk, grounded upon base external principles—a “walking after the flesh”—not *before God*. Even the engagements of active duty may be the subtle snare of the great enemy to divert us from intense personal religion: to spoil the hidden walk of communion with God, by concentrating the mind upon a³ more public, and, perhaps, a more useful walk. Thus too often the vital principle of religion sinks into a stated habit. “Walking with God”³ is the secret spring of the Christian. “Walking before God” is his open profession—the manifestation and the exercise of the hidden principle. For in all things private as well as public, in

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.² Gen. xvii. 1.³ Gen. v. 24, vi. 9.

things the most trivial as well as the most weighty, to have our eye fixed in dutiful reverence upon the Omniscient, Omnipresent eye of Jehovah—what solemnity would it give to our whole behaviour! what influence would it have upon our public professions, our general conversation, our secret duties! We should be energetic in “serving our own generation by the will of God:”¹ and yet, while walking before men, should be in reality “walking before God”—*all our ways before him*—done in his sight, accepted in his favour,

When, therefore, I am about to venture upon any line of conduct, let me consider the watchful eye over me, that pierces into the deepest recesses of my thoughts, and brings, as it were, to daylight my principles, my motives and my ends. Above all, let me ever recollect, that he, “*before whom are all my ways,*” is He that hung upon the cross for my sins. Let me then walk, as if he were standing before me in all the endearing obligations of his love. Oh! do not I owe him sacrifice for sacrifice, heart for heart, life for life? Then surely I cannot be dead, insensible, sluggish in keeping his precepts. I cannot forbear to love him, or to conform to his rule—“*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*”² Let not the fear of legality make me indifferent to the privilege of “keeping the commandments” of this my beloved Master and Lord. Let me live under the solemn recollection—“Thou, God, seest me”³ and in the joyful assurance—“Thou, God, lovest me;”⁴ and his ways will be to me holiness, happiness, heaven.

¹ Acts xiii. 36. ² John xiv. 15. ³ Gen. xvi. 13, with John i. 48.
⁴ Jer. xxxi. 3, with John xiii. 1.

PART XXII.

169. *Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord: give me understanding, according to thy word.*—170. *Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.*

WE mark David here, where he always loved to be,—a suppliant at the throne of grace. Many had been his “*cries and supplications.*” His petition now is—that they may “*come near before his Lord.*” Oh! that our wants of every moment were felt with the same pressure, and carried to the Lord with the same faith, earnestness, humility, and perseverance! Richness of expression, and fluency of utterance, are the mere shell and shadow of prayer. The life of prayer is the “*cry*” of the heart to God. The eloquence of prayer is its earnestness. The power of prayer is that which cometh, not from education, or from the natural desire of the man; but that “*which is from above*”—“*the spirit of supplication*”—“*the Spirit of adoption.*” The urgency of present need calls for instant prayer. The soul is at stake; the enemy is within the walls—perhaps within the citadel. Oh, what a privilege to know that we have “*a strong habitation, whereunto we may continually resort*”—to be able to remind the Lord—“*Thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock, and my fortress!*”¹

¹ Psalm lxxi. 3.

But then we must see, that our "*cry comes before—comes near before the Lord;*" that nothing blocks up the way, or interrupts the communication. If we are believers, the way is open; "the middle wall of partition is broken down." Oh, let us be excited to greater nearness of communion! "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh,"¹ why should we be backward to come? Had we not seen the way marked by this blood of sprinkling we should (if we have had any sight into our own hearts) no more have dared to take one step into the awful presence of God, than to rush into the devouring flame. If, in a moment of extremity, we had felt that we must pray or perish, we should have had no boldness to open our mouths before God,—much less to expect that our "*supplication would come near before him,*" had we not been "made nigh by the blood of Christ."² But what an amount of privilege is it, that this way to God is always open—that, as members of Christ, we stand in the sight of God as pure as Christ is pure—that we have not only "access" but "*access with confidence,*"³—yea, with the same confidence of the Son of God himself! For the Father is never weary as delighting in his dear Son; or in those who are one with him. If he therefore takes our names into the holy place—if he offer sacrifice and incense for us, and sprinkle us with his blood—"in him we are complete"⁴—in him therefore let us "glory."⁵ "Having an high-priest over the

¹ Heb. x. 19, 20.

² Eph. ii. 13.

³ Eph. iii. 12. Esther had "access" to the King—but not "*with confidence*"—iv. 16.

⁴ Col. ii. 10.

⁵ Isa. xlv. 25.

house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith.”¹

But where we feel as if we did not, could not, reach the throne of grace, “is there not a cause?” Our distance from God must be traced to a deeper origin than the dulness and insensibility of our hearts. The real difficulty of prayer, and indeed the actual inability to pray, arises in many, and probably in most cases, from an indistinct perception of the way of access. We can readily conceivê of this, in those who are totally ignorant of Christ; and the same must be admitted in the cases of weak, unestablished, or negligent Christians. Through ignorance of the fulness and freeness of the gospel in the one, and indulgence of sin or secret unwatchfulness in the other, the way of access (only perceptible by the eye of faith) becomes obscured, the desire faint, the spiritual strength weakened. And instead of the acknowledgment—“The Lord hath heard the voice of my supplications,”² we have the mournful complaints—“My soul cleaveth to the dust—Oh that I were as in months past!”³ It must be so; for prayer without faith is a heartless ceremony in the spirit of bondage. That which gives to it life and acceptance is its immediate connexion with the offices of Christ.⁴ The ignorant and self-righteous may find it a matter of course (as easy as it is fruitless) to bow their knee in the form of prayer. But the light, that darts in upon awakened conscience, reveals something hitherto unknown of God and of themselves, and shews the ground of confidence for a self-condemned sinner, to be a matter of the deepest mystery, and most amazing difficulty. Such a confidence, however, God has laid open to us: We cannot

¹ Heb. x. 21, 22. ² Psalm vi. 9. ³ Ver. 25. Job xxix. 2.

⁴ Heb. iv. 14—16; x. 19—22.

honour him more than by making use of it. All that come in the name of Jesus are welcome; why then, penitent sinner, should not you be welcome? The throne of grace was raised for sinners such as you. You cannot want larger promises, or a better plea than meets you there. You come, not because you are worthy, but because you are bid, to come. Take the command, and lay it upon your conscience. Christ is your only way to God. Faith is the act and exercise of coming to Christ.* Faith, therefore, will bring you to God, if you have not hitherto come: or restore you to God, if you have wandered from him.

But there may be a secret departure from God even in the engagement of active service, or in the exercises of social religion. Be assured, therefore, that if these duties are substituted for secret communion with God, "the things that remain in us will be ready to die;"¹ ordinances will fail to enrich; Christian fellowship will bring no refreshment: and the soul, while blessed with the abundance of means of grace "in the fulness of its sufficiency, will be in straits."² Indeed, if our affections and feelings are moved in social exercises, and are cold and insensible when we are alone with God, it is a bad symptom of our state. What then do we know of the comforts of the closet? Do we pray because we love to pray, or only because our consciences constrain us to the duty? Does the Lord mark those secret transactions with himself, that manifest our hearts to be really drawn to him? Is it any pressing business of our soul's salvation, that brings us to God? Are our services enlivened with spiritual apprehensions of Christ? It is possible long to continue in the outward course of duty: and yet not one of our prayers ever to "*come*

¹ Rev. iii. 2.

² Job xx. 22.

near before the Lord ?” Perhaps we have not come in the appointed way; and therefore we have not really come at all. Or if the name of Christ has been affixed to our prayers, it has been rather as a component part of a formal system, than as an exercise of dependence in seeking acceptance with God.

But it may be, that we have backslidden from God in a habit of indulged coldness or wilful iniquity. Now if we would expect “the candle of the Lord again to shine upon our heads, and his secret to be upon our tabernacles,”¹ we must rest satisfied with nothing short of the full restoration of our privileges. We must return to the Lord with deepened contrition in his appointed way, and wait for him to look upon us, and once more to “*let our supplication come near before him.*” He had “gone, and returned to his place, till we acknowledged our offences, and sought his face;”² and he is now sitting on a “throne of grace,” “waiting that he may be gracious.”³ Again and again, therefore, let us fall down at his feet, and never cease to pray, until we feel that our “*cry and supplication come near before him,*” and spiritual “*understanding and deliverance*” are vouchsafed.

It is beautiful to observe the Psalmist’s faith, like oil, feeding the flame of his supplication. Every petition is urged upon the warrant of a promise—“*according to thy word.*” The promises were the very breath of his supplication; exciting his expectation for a favourable answer, and exercising his patience, until the answer should come. Though in possession of so comparatively small a portion of the blessed book, he seemed always to find a word for the present occasion; always able to show to his God his own hand and seal. Alas !

¹ Job xxix. 3, 4.² Hos. v. 15.³ Isa. xxx. 18.

sometimes with the whole word of God before us, we are at a loss to appropriate one of its innumerable promises to the circumstances, wants, or difficulties of the day. Yet with all our contracted views of the covenant, still our interest in it is not denied. Such is the condescension of our tender Father that he accepts even the stammering language of faith in his children! The cry "Abba Father," feeble as it may be—'though' (as Luther sweetly expresses it) 'it is but a cry; yet it doth so pierce the clouds, that there is nothing else heard in heaven of God and his angels.'¹ And how delightful is the thought that God's elect—as they will shortly be gathered a countless multitude around the heavenly throne²—so do they now hold spiritual communion with each other, while "they cry day and night"³ before their Father's throne of grace! True it is—we understand not one another's tongues. Yet does our loving Father understand us all. Nor do our different dialects cause any confusion in heaven; but rather unite and form one cloud of incense, ascending with continual acceptance and delight in his presence. Ineffable is the delight, with which our Beloved enjoys that communion with his people which he purchased with his own blood. "O my dove that art in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely."⁴

¹ Luther on Gal. iv. 6. And again—'This little word, Father, conceived effectually in the heart, passeth all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and of the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world. This matter is not expressed with words, but with groanings; which groanings cannot be uttered with any words of eloquence, for no tongue can express them.'

² Rev. vii. 9.

³ Luke xviii. 7.

⁴ Can. ii. 14, also iv. 11.

171. *My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught we thy statutes.*

How happy is it to go to God with a cheerful heart, and to be as large in praise as in prayer! The answer of the supplication for *spiritual understanding and deliverance* naturally issues in the sacrifice of praise. Guilt had sealed David's lips, while living in the commission of sin, and restrained alike the utterance of praise and prayer. But when awakened to a sense of his sin, how earnest were his cries! "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."¹ And if guilt or unbelief has made us dumb, his petitions will be made the means to tune our hearts to the "songs of Zion." When *the Lord has taught us in his statutes* the revelation of himself—as having given his dear Son for us and to us, "the tongue of the dumb is made to sing"²—"*Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!*"³

And do I not remember "the time of love," when I was "a brand plucked out of the fire"—a redeemed sinner—a pardoned rebel—destined for a seat on the throne of God—indulged with a taste, and assured of the completion of heavenly bliss? This was a work worthy of God—a work, which none but God could have wrought. What *mercy* is this that was vouchsafed! Everlasting! Unchangeable! Let me cast myself daily upon it; yea, let me bury myself in it! What gratitude is demanded! "*My lips shall utter praise, now that he has taught me his statutes.*" "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry

¹ Psalm li. 12, 15.

² Isa. xxxv. 6.

³ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.”¹

Again—I seemed to have sunk beyond the possibility of help. No means, no ministers, no providences, could reach the extremity of my case. All were “physicians of no value,”² tried and tried again; but tried in vain. But, in the midst of weakness thoroughly felt, “strength was made perfect.”³ The threatening clouds were dispersed; the breaches were healed; the veil of unbelief was rent. “The right hand of the Lord had brought mighty things to pass”⁴—“He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it;”⁵ and it is “marvellous in our eyes.”⁶ Let my stammering “*lips utter praise.*” What a display of *power!* It is the spark preserved in the ocean unquenched, the drop in the flames unconsumed—the feather in the storm unshaken. “Who is a God like unto thee?” “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.”⁷

And again, I was perplexed in a dark and bewildered path. Every dispensation of the Lord appeared to frown upon me. One dark hour had blotted out all the recollections of my former comforts; and it was as if I never could, never should, rejoice again. But little did I think, during the season of trial, how the Lord was “abounding towards me in all wisdom and prudence”⁸—how his arrows were sharpened with love, how he was “humbling me, and proving me, to know what was in my heart,”⁹ and in the moment of chastening was speaking to me. I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord: thoughts of

¹ Isa. xii. 1.

² Job xiii. 4.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁴ Psalm cxviii. 16. prayer-book version.

⁵ Isa. xxxviii. 15.

⁶ Psalm cxviii. 23.

⁷ Micah vii. 13.

Psalm cxv. 1.

⁸ Eph. i. 8.

⁹ Deut. viii. 2.

peace, and not of evil, “to give you an expected end.”¹ What a display of “wisdom!” “My lips shall utter praise;” for if I “should hold my peace, the stones would immediately cry out.”²

Surely thus to glorify my Saviour, is as high a privilege as to enjoy him. Nay, is it not the means of increasing my enjoyment of him; for thus is my love excited, and every grace called into active exercise for his sake. Let me then watch, lest the enemy rob me,—as too often he has done,—of my high privilege. Let me make much of secret prayer. Let me be separated from an ensnaring world. Let me dread separation from my God. And when deadness or unbelief has estranged me from him, let me never rest, until I once more walk in the light of his countenance. And to this end, let me continually “receive the atonement,” believing that it is always presented, and always accepted on my behalf. Let me fix the eye of my faith, weak and dim as it may be, constantly upon Jesus. He must do all for me, in me, by me. He must give me an abundant increase of “the spirit of wisdom and revelation,”³ that I may be “taught” more and more of “the statutes” of my God: that my heart may be delightfully engaged with “my lips in uttering his praise.”

172. *My tongue shall speak of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness.*

To speak of God and for him, will be the desire and delight of him, whose heart and lips have been taught to “utter praise.” Alas! how reluctant are we to this work! Our conversation with each other—

¹ Jer. xxix. 11.

² Luke xix. 40.

³ Eph. i. 17.

how seldom is it “seasoned with grace!”¹ So much of this poor world’s nothing! So little of Jesus! But “if so be that we have tasted that the Lord is gracious,” and if our hearts are under the influence of his love, we cannot but commend him to others. “We cannot but speak “of his holy character, and his unbounded love. And when we see how hardly men judge of him—how they count his “commandments grievous,” and his way “unequal,”² we shall be constrained to bear our testimony, that “*all his commandments are righteousness*,” restraining the power of sin, exciting to holiness of conversation, and in every way conforming the soul to his image.

Our meditation on this verse will be rendered profitable, by turning it into a prayer. “Lord, open thou my lips, that my tongue may speak of thy word.” Honour me, O my God, by helping me to shew, that “*all thy commandments are righteousness*.” If we were living in the atmosphere and breathing of prayer, how much more fluent would be our tongue to speak for God, and our speech more free “to the use of edifying!”³ Not indeed that a superficial knowledge of the word will give a readiness and unction in speaking of its blessed contents. It must be made really our own: it must be known experimentally, in order to be enjoyed and recommended to others. And when this is the case with the servant of God, how cheering, how enlivening his conversation! His “light so shines before men, that” they are constrained to “glorify his Father which is in heaven.”⁴

Perhaps, believer, you may have been led to keep silence from *supposed* inability, natural bashfulness, or want of seasonable opportunity. But under un-

¹ Col. iv. 6.

² Ezek. xviii. 25.

³ Eph. iv. 29.

⁴ Matt. v. 16.

favourable circumstance it will generally be found, that something may be said, as well as done, in the service of God. And whilst it is well carefully to watch against the “talk of the lips, which tendeth only to penury,”¹ do not suffer the crafty devices of Satan to shut the mouth of the faithful witnesses of God. Beware lest through the scrupulous tenderness of your conscience, he “get an advantage of you,” and by means of your silence, weaken the cause of your Master, which it is your sincere desire to support.² Guard against the influence of unbelief. Bring your weakness and inability daily to the Lord. Let any dreaded inconsistency of profession be searched out, examined, and lamented before him, and opposed in dependence on his grace; but never let it be made a covering for indolence, or supply fuel for despondency. Consider how your interest in a Divine Saviour makes your way open to bring all your wants to him. Be encouraged therefore to ask for the spirit of God to guide your lips: that a poor weak sinner may be permitted to “shew forth the praises of Him,” who is surrounded with all the Hosts of Heaven.

When however our silence has arisen from the too feeble resistance of our natural carelessness and indolence, the recollection of many important opportunities of glorying our Saviour, lost beyond recal, may well excite the prayer—“Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”³ Oh! to have the preciousness of souls deeply impressed upon our hearts! Oh! for that compassionate love, that would never suffer us to meet a

¹ Prov. xiv. 23.

² It was an excellent saying of Archbishop Usher, when in the society of his friends—‘A word of Christ before we part.’

³ Psalm li. 14.

fellow-sinner, without lifting up our hearts to God on his behalf; making an effort to win his soul to Christ: and manifesting an earnest desire for his salvation! What loss is there to our own souls in these neglected opportunities of blessing the souls of others! For never do we receive richer fruit to ourselves, than in the act or endeavour to communicate to others. The heart becomes enlarged by every practical exercise of Christian love. Yet much simplicity—much unction from above—much tenderness of heart—much wisdom combined with boldness—is needed in our daily conversation, that we may “make manifest the savour of the knowledge of Christ in every place;”¹ and specially—that our very desires to bring sinners to the Gospel may proceed—not from a goading conscience, much less from pride and vain glory—but from the pure source of love to Christ and to our fellow-sinners. For even if we are as “full of matter,” as Elihu^c was, nothing will be said for God—nothing, that will “minister grace to the hearers,” unless the influence of the Divine Spirit fills our hearts, as “a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life,”⁴—a blessing to all around us.

173. *Let thy hand help me: for I have chosen thy precepts.*

DAVID, having engaged himself to a bold profession of his God, now comes to seek his needful supply of “help.”—“*Let thine hand help me.*” And if we are encouraged to “come to the throne of grace,” that we may find “grace to help in time of need,”⁵ when are we not to come? For is not every moment

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 14.

² Compare Job xxxii. 18—20.

³ Comp. Eph. v. 18, 19.

⁴ John iv. 14.

⁵ Heb. iv. 16.

a "time of need," such as may quicken us to flee to the "strong tower," whither "the righteous runneth, and is safe?"¹ Besieged without; betrayed within: "wrestling against flesh and blood," and yet not against flesh and blood only;² often discouraged by the little ground we seem to gain in the struggle, surely we need all the help of Omnipotence to sustain us in the tremendous conflict. We may plead our "*choice of his precepts*," in looking for his "*help*."³ David had before "taken the *testimonies of God as his heritage*"⁴—including all the precious promises of the Gospel, extending to every necessity of time, and to every prospect for eternity. He now confesses his obligation—"in *choosing the precepts*"—a happy choice—the influence of the Spirit upon his heart.⁵

Prompt obedience, in simplicity of faith, will form the character of his choice. Many carnal suggestions are ready to offer themselves, the moment that the purpose is forming into the choice. "The things that were gain to us," and which now must be "counted loss for Christ,"⁶ (should we allow them an entrance into our hearts at this crisis) will bring much hesitation and perplexity. Conferences "with flesh and blood" are amongst the most subtle hindrances to Christian determination.⁷ "What will the world say? If I go too far, I shall give offence; all my influence will be gone; and all my prospects of eventually benefitting those around me will be blasted. The apprehension also of losing the affection, and of incurring the displeasure, of those whom my heart holds dear, is most fearful. And then, this sacrifice is too costly to make; that pleasure too hard to resign.

¹ Prov. xviii. 10.

³ Verse 94.

⁶ Phil. iii. 7.

⁴ Verse 111.

² Eph. vi. 12.

⁵ See Ezek. xi. 19, 20.

⁷ Compare Gal. i. 16.

Thoughts of this nature—the injections of the tempter—are ever at the door; and even when effectual resistance is offered, the struggle is often most severe. But it is such a mighty help in this conflict, when one desire has taken sole possession of the heart,—“ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do; ”¹ when we are so crucified to worldly influence, whether of pleasure, profit, fear, or esteem, as to be ready to act upon the resolution—“ Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.”² Now it is that the heavenly beauty of the religion of the gospel breaks in upon us.

Experience of our own weakness, and of the great power of the world, is gradually preparing us for victory over it. We shall then most specially find our happiness in losing our own will; and our Master’s cross will be a delightful burden—like wings to a bird, or sails to a ship—assisting, instead of retarding, our course. The more we trust to his help and guidance in every thing, the more we shall be able to do, and the more delightful will his service be to us.

The want of a determined choice is the secret of much of that halting profession that prevails among us. A compromise is attempted with the world. “ The offence of the cross ” begins to “ cease.” A middle path of serious religion is marked out, divested of what is called *needless offensiveness*—forgetting that the religion that pleases the world will never be acceptable with God; nor can the religion that pleases God be ever accommodated to the inclination of the world. Oh! we shall do well to consider, whether the way of “ *the Lord’s Precepts* ” may not be found too hard, too strait, too unfrequented—whether we are prepared to brave the pointed finger and whispered scoff of the

¹ Acts ix. 6.

² 2 Cor. v. 16.

ungodly; and, perhaps, the opposition of beloved friends, with mistaken tenderness resisting our course.¹ Often has the profession of Christ been hastily taken up and relinquished.² He that wishes to abide by it, must daily learn this lesson—“*Without me ye can do nothing:*” and, in conscious helplessness, he will often breathe the supplication—“*Let thine hand help me.*”

Nor is this petition needful only in the first view of this choice, and in the first desire to appropriate it. In the growing and more decided conviction of its superior happiness, and in the daily endeavour to live in it, we shall find increasing need for the same acknowledgment of helplessness, and the same cry for support. And blessed be God for the assurance, that he has “laid help upon one that is mighty;”³ so that our insufficiency and all-sufficiency are visible at one glance; and “when we are” most “weak, then are we” most “strong.”⁴ “They that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee—*Fear not, I will help thee.*”⁵

174. *I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight.*

BEFORE we close this Psalm, let us dwell once more upon this word—salvation. Common as is its use, to the believer it has a constant freshness and an infinite meaning. Do we wonder at his *longing for it*? *Look at his fulness*—including all the mercy of the everlasting covenant—*look at its ground*—that work of Calvary’s cross once “finished,”⁶ and leaving nothing

¹ Comp. Luke xiv. 26.

² Comp. Matt. viii. 19, 20.

³ Psalm lxxxix. 19.

⁴ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

⁵ Isaiah xli. 12, 13. Compare the whole passage, verses 10—16.

⁶ John xix. 30.

to be filled up or improved; standing out in all its glorious completeness; constraining the admiration, and encouraging the confidence of the chief of sinners; but wholly disclaiming all assistance from the most eminent saint. *Look at its simplicity*—not keeping the sinner aloof from the Saviour—not hedging up or bewildering the open freeness of his path; but bringing him immediate peace and joy in resting upon the great atonement of the gospel.¹ This is indeed an object for the *longing* of the soul, that feels its own pressing wants, and sees in this *salvation* an instant and full supply. This *longing* marks the character of evangelical religion—*not merely duty, but delight*. The mind wearies in the continued exertion *for duty*; but it readily falls in with delight. Duties become privileges, when Christ is their source and life. Thus every step of progress is progress in happiness. The world's all to the believer is really nothing. It presents nothing to feed the appetite or quench the thirst of an immortal soul. Indeed the creatures were commissioned to withhold consolation, until every desire was concentrated in the single object—"Thou, O God, art the thing that I long for"² until he found rest in the answer to his prayer—"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."³ And now he enjoys his earthly comforts, as not abusing them,⁴ because he loves them as God would have them loved, and longs for his salvation above them all. This is true religion—when the Lord of all occupies that place in the heart which he fills in the universe—*There* he is "All in all." *Here* the believer cries—"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."⁵

¹ See Acts ii. 37—47; viii. 5—8, 39; xvi. 31—34. 1 Thess. i. 6.

² Psalm lxxi. 4. P.T.

³ Psalm xxxv. 3.

⁴ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

⁵ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

O what a privilege is it to have him in heart, in thought, and in view; to be rejoicing in his presence; and to be longing for a more full conformity to his image, and for a more lively enjoyment of his love? If this be but earth, what must heaven be! This *longing* is a *satisfactory evidence of the work of God.*¹ It exercises the soul in habitual contemplation of the Saviour, in nearer communion with him, and supreme “*delight in his law.*” Such desires will be unutterably increased, and infinitely satisfied ‘in the fruition of his glorious Godhead.’²

But the Lord often brings this charge against his professing people—“*Thou hast left thy first love.*”³ The principle is not dead, but in the measure and degree of its operations it is decayed. Human nature is prone to apostacy. Slumber unconsciously steals upon the soul. Faith is not in *habitual* exercise. The attraction of the Saviour is not set forth. His love is not meditated upon. The soul is satisfied with former affections to him. There is little heart to labour for him. The means of communion with him are slighted; the heart naturally becomes cold in spiritual desires, and warm in worldly pursuits; and too often without any smittings of conscience for divided love.

Some professors indeed consider this declension of affections to be a matter of course. The young convert is supposed to abound most in love, and, as he advances, his fervour gradually to subside into matured judgment. Those indeed who “have no root in themselves,” lose their lively affections, and their religion with them.⁴ But surely the *real* principle of love cannot decay; that is, our esteem of God cannot

¹ See Nehemiah i. 11.

² Collect for Epiphany.

³ Revelation ii. 4.

⁴ See Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

be lowered; our "*longing for his salvation*" cannot languish; our delight in the enjoyment of it cannot diminish, without guilt and loss to our souls. The Lord calls for our love,¹ and it is most unreasonable to deny him his own. He is the same as when we first loved him. *Then* we thought him worthy of our highest love. Do we now repent of having loved him so much? Have we found him less than our expectations? Can we bestow our heart elsewhere with stricter justice, or to better advantage? Do not all the grounds of our love to him continue in full force? Have they not rather increased every day and hour? What would an indulgent husband think of incessant and increasing attentions repaid with diminished affection? Oh! let us be ashamed of our indolence, and (according to our Lord's direction²) "remember" the times, when *our longings for his salvation* were more intense; when our communion with him was more heavenly; when we were ready to labour and suffer for him, and even to die to go home to his presence. Let us "repent" with deeper contrition, and "do our first works;" never resting till we can take up afresh the language of delight—"I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord."

Some however of the Lord's dear children are distressed in the conscious coldness of their spiritual affections. But if it be a mark of the decay of grace to "lose our first love," it is at least a mark of the truth of grace to mourn over this loss. There is always a blessing for those "that hunger and thirst after righteousness."³ These restless desires are the beating pulse of the hidden life; and if there be not always a *sensible* growth of desire and enjoyment,

¹ See Prov. xxiii. 26.

² See Rev. ii. 5.

³ Matt. v. 6.

there may be (as with the trees in winter) growth at the root, in a more fixed habit of grace and love,* in a deeper spirit of humility, and in a more established self-knowledge and simplicity. Yet the shortest way of peace will be to look off from our "*longing for this salvation,*" to the "salvation" itself.¹ For nothing is more desecrating to this great work—nothing is more paralyzing to its power to save, than the incorporating with it the admixture of our own experience as the ground of hope. The most Christian feelings must find no place at the foundation. Indeed their continual variation renders them, especially in the hour of temptation, very uncertain. Yet amid all this fluctuation, Christ may always be safely trusted. While, therefore, our coldness humbles us before God, let us not brood in despondency, and neglect to look at the cross of Jesus. Let not our eyes be so filled with tears of contrition, as to obscure the sight of his free and full salvation. "Looking" singly "unto Jesus" as our peace and our life, is at once our duty, our safety, and the secret principle of our daily progress heavenward. We shall indeed enjoy the realized perception of our own emptiness in the contemplation of his unbounded fulness.

But we mark the connexion here between the "*longing for salvation,*" and "*delight in the law.*" It is at least an incidental evidence, that right apprehensions of "*salvation,*" must be grounded upon the word or "*law of God;*" and that a religion of feeling is a religion of delusion. Our *delight* is not only *in his love,* but *in his law.* And so practical is Christian privilege, that *holy longing for salvation*

¹ See Hebrews xii. 2.

will always expand itself in habitual *delight in the law*; which in its turn will enlarge the desire for the full enjoyment of *salvation*. All spiritual desire therefore, that is not practical in its exercise, is impulse, excitement—not the religion of the heart. In this man of God was holiness fervency, “*delight*.”

Well would it be for us, if this beautiful Psalm, and each verse of it, should quicken us to be followers of him, who evidently knew so much of the heavenly joys of religion. Why should we not, why do we not, determine to know as much of God as we can? Why are our “*longings for his salvation*,” so transient and so few? The soul that really *longs* shall “not be ashamed of its hope.” Even to taste the present fruits—though it be but a taste—in a sense of reconciliation, liberty of access, a beam of the love of Jesus in the heart, is unutterable enjoyment. It strengthens the soul for endurance of trials, and for a devoted, self-denying, obedient service. But if what we have known is but a taste of heavenly pleasures; let us seek for those more glowing desires, which shall be fully satisfied: but which will not, cannot, be satisfied with any thing short of the “fulness of God.”¹ There are heights and depths of Divine love yet unexplored; and it is an encouragement to remember, that he who has vouchsafed large apprehensions of them to others, “is *rich* in mercy to *all that call upon him* ;”² that the fountain of everlasting love is ever flowing, ever full; and that he who commands us to “open our mouths wide”—has promised—“I will fill them.”³

Lord! of all power and might, create in our souls a more intense “*longing for thy salvation*,” and a

¹ Compare Eph. iii. 19. Psalm xvii. 15.

² Romans x. 12.

³ Psalm lxxxi. 10.

more fervent "*delight in thy law.*" And as our "*longings for thy salvation*" increase, oh! nail us to the door-posts of thy house, and may we be thy happy servants for ever!

175. *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee: and let thy judgments help me.*

WHAT is the life that the Psalmist is now praying for, but the *salvation* for which he was *longing*? The taste that he has received makes him hunger for a higher and continued enjoyment; not for any selfish gratification, but that he might employ himself in the praise of his God. Indeed, the close of this Psalm exhibits that character of praise pervading his experience, which has been generally remarked in the concluding Psalms of this sacred book,¹—and which is indeed "the strength" of the soul. Yet he alone is fitted for this heavenly exercise, of whom it has been said,—"*This my son was dead, and is alive again.*"² And how will he who has "*looked to the hole of the pit whence he is digged,*"³ who has been awakened to a sight of that tremendous gulf, from which he is but "*scarcely saved,*"⁴ long to give utterance to the effusions of a praising heart. How will he cry for the quickening influence of "*the Lord and Giver of life,*" to stir him up to this delightful privilege! Praise springs from prayer—"*Let my soul*

¹ Verses 164, 171, 172. The last six Psalms are for the most part throughout the breathings of praise. They were probably written at the close of life, and may be considered as striking indications of a soul ripening for glory. As the perfumes of Arabia Felix are said to exhale their odours in the neighbouring provinces; so it is no marvel, if, as "*the sweet Psalmist of Israel*" drew near to the happy country, he should have inhaled its atmosphere of praise.

² Luke xv. 24.

³ Isaiah li. 1.

⁴ 1 Peter iv. 18.

live, and it shall praise thee." When the breathing of "life into our souls" enlivens our services, we become, in the noblest sense, "living souls."¹

Too often, however, the consciousness of the inconstancy, carelessness, and unspirituality of our hearts, damps our song. But let every recollection of our sin be accompanied with an humble yet assured confidence in the Lord's pardoning grace. The abominations of a desperately wicked and unsearchably deceitful heart may well lead us to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes."² Yet in the lowest depths of abasement, the Saviour's blood, applied to the conscience, "cleanseth from all sin."³ He who once "passed by us, and saw us polluted in our blood, and said unto us when we were in our blood, Live:"⁴ still "holdeth our souls in life,"⁵ but covering our daily infirmities, and maintaining our everlasting acceptance before God.

But while the song of praise dwells on our lips for life, thus freely given, let us guard against all hindrance to its growth and influence. For if the life within waxes low, praise will be dull and heartless; but when the assured believer cries with acceptance — "*Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*"—see how his spirit kindles with holy fire—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!"⁶ The work of praise is now his nature, his element, his delight. No wonder, then, that he continues his cry for the daily renewal of his spiritual life, that he may return to this sweet antepast of heaven—" *Let my soul*

¹ Gen. ii. 7.² Job xlii. 6³ 1 John i. 7.⁴ Ezek. xvi. 6.⁵ Psalm lxvi. 9.⁶ 1 Peter i. 3.

live." And, indeed, this life—the more it is known, the more will it form the constant matter for prayer. For what besides makes existence tolerable to a child of God? The mere actings of a sickly pulsation can never satisfy him. Considering how much nearer he might live to God than he has yet known, he longs for more vigorous influence of the Divine principle, and yet in his most active enjoyments, his insufficiency for this sacred work presses upon him. Every expression of praise, therefore, is followed with petition for help—“*Let thy judgments help me.*” Give me such an enlightened apprehension of thy word—of thy character—of thy perfections as the God of my salvation, as may furnish abundant matter for unceasing praise; so that my daily exercise may be—“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

176. *I have gone astray like a lost sheep : seek thy servant ; for I do not forget thy commandments.*

THAT “all we like sheep have gone astray,”² is the testimony from the mouth of God; confirmed, if indeed it needed confirmation, by daily experience and observation. But how affecting, that this should not only be the description of a world living without God, but the confession of God’s own people—“*I have gone astray like a lost sheep!*” That they should ever wander from privileges so great—from a God so good—from a Shepherd so kind! What can induce them to turn their backs upon their best Friend, and sin against the most precious love that was ever

¹ Ephesians v. 20.

² Isaiah liii. 6. 1 Peter ii. 25.

known, but something, that must, upon reflection, fill them with shame! The blame is readily cast upon the temptation of Satan, the seductive witcheries of the world, or some untoward circumstances. But whoever deals honestly with himself, must trace the source of backsliding to his own heart, and say—“This is *my* infirmity.”¹ And have we replaced what we have wilfully yielded up with any thing of equal or superior value? May it not be asked of us—“What fruit have ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed; for the end of those things is death.”²

But there is no enjoyment, while distant from the beloved fold. It is as impossible for the child of God to be happy, when separated from his God, as if he were in the regions of eternal despair. He has not lost—he cannot wholly lose—this recollection of the forsaken blessing. In struggling weeping faith, he cries—“*Seek thy servant.*” ‘I cannot find my way back: the good Shepherd must *seek* me. Once I knew the path; but now that I have wandered into bye-paths, I am no more able to return than I was to come at first. I have no guide but the Shepherd whom I have left.’ How cheering then is his office character! “Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out; as a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day.”³ Cannot I set my seal to his faithful discharge of his office—“He restoreth my soul?”⁴

If I want further encouragement to guide my steps

¹ Psalm lxxvii. 10.

² Romans vi. 21.

³ Ezekiel xxxiv. 11, 12.

⁴ Psalm xxiii. 3.

homeward, let me think of his own description of his tender faithfulness, and compassionate yearnings over his lost sheep; not shewing it the way back to the fold, and leaving it to come after him: but "laying it upon his own shoulders, and bringing it home:" all upbraidings forgotten; all recollection of his own pains swallowed up in the joy, that he hath "found the sheep which was lost."¹ And when I consider, too, that the express commission, that brought the Shepherd from heaven to earth—from the throne of God to the manger, and thence to the garden and cross,—was "to seek and to save that which was lost;"² surely I may add, in contrite grief for my wanderings, the confidence of my faith—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep: seek thy servant." I cannot forbear to plead, that though a rebellious prodigal, I am still "*thy servant*," thy child: I still bear the child's mark of an interest in thy covenant. Though a wanderer from the fold, "*I do not forget thy commandments*." Nothing can erase thy law, which was "written in my mind, and inward parts"³ by the finger and Spirit of God, as an earnest of my adoption—as the pledge of my restoration. What man writes is easily blotted out: what God writes is indelible. Let me then lie humbled and self-abased. But let me not forget my claim—what has been done for me. Thus again I hope to be received as a "dear" and "pleasant child;"⁴ again to be clothed with "the best robe," to be welcomed with fresh tokens of my Father's everlasting love,⁵ and to assured with the precious promise—"My sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of my hand."⁶

Such, Christian reader, would be the application we

¹ Luke xv. 4–6.

³ Jer. xxxi. 33.

⁵ Comp. Luke xv. 22, 23.

² Luke xix. 10.

⁴ Jer. v. 20.

⁶ John x. 28.

should make of this verse to ourselves ; and such a penitent confession of our backslidings, united with a believing dependence on the long-tried grace and faithfulness of our God, would form a suitable conclusion to our meditations on this most interesting Psalm. We would unite the publican's prayer with the great Apostle's confidence ; and while in holy brokenness of heart we would wish to live and die, smiting upon our breast, and saying—" God be merciful to me a sinner ;" ¹ the remembrance of our adoption warrants the expression of assurance—" I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." ² Yet, as it regards the experience of David, is there not something striking, and we had almost said, unexpected, in the conclusion of this Psalm ? To hear one—who has throughout been expressing such holy and joyful aspirations for the salvation of his God, such fervent praises of his love, that we seem to shrink back from the comparison with him, as if considering him almost on the verge of heaven—to hear this " man after God's own heart," sinking himself to the lowest dust, under the sense of the evil of his heart, and his perpetual tendency to wander from his God, is indeed a most instructive lesson. It marks the believer's conflict sustained to the end—the humility, and yet the strength of his confidence—the highest notes of praise, combining with the deepest expressions of abasement—forming that harmony of acceptable service, which ascends " like pillars of smoke" ³ before God. And thus will our Christian progress be chequered, until we reach the regions of unmixed praise, where we shall no longer mourn over our wanderings, no longer feel any inclination to err

¹ Luke xviii. 13.

² 2 Tim. i. 12.

³ Cant. iii. 6.

from our Shepherd's presence, no more experience the wretchedness of distance from him, or the difficulty of returning to him—where we shall be eternally safe in the heavenly fold, to “go no more out.”¹ For “HE THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM; THEY SHALL HUNGER NO MORE, NEITHER THIRST ANY MORE; NEITHER SHALL THE SUN LIGHT ON THEM, NOR ANY HEAT; FOR THE LAMB WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE SHALL FEED THEM, AND SHALL LEAD THEM UNTO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATERS; AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES.”²

¹ Rev. iii. 12.

² Rev. vii. 15—17.

INDEX.

A

ABBA, Father, 476.
 Acceptance, 284, 285, 358, 359.
 Access, way of, 30, 221, 226, 325, 326, 472.
 ——— importance of knowing, 473, 474.
 ——— known to Old Testament believers, Pref. iv. 368, 369.
 Acknowledgment of God's faithfulness, 169—172, 201—204.
 ——— righteousness, 378—380, 391—393.
 Actings of faith habitual, 457.
 Activity, spiritual, 83—85.
 Adoption, spirit of, 38, 395, 440, 476, 496.
 Advantage of religious vows. See Vows.
 Advocacy of Christ. See Jesus Christ.
 Afflictions, blessings of, 179—181, 189—192, 201—204.
 ——— comfort in, 131—133, 143—145, 158—160, 281—284, 394—397.
 ——— confidence in, 228—230.
 ——— lost, 192.
 ——— protracted, 229.
 ——— submission under, 202.
 ——— support of the word, under.
 See Word.
 ——— teaching of, 189—192.
 ——— gracious uses of, 203.
 ——— worldly, 159, 160, 215, 282, 396, 397.
Agatha, martyr, 118 n.
Ahitophel, 288.
Ainsworth referred to, 37 n.
Alleine, Joseph, quoted, 123 n.
Ambrose quoted, Pref. viii. n.
Answers to prayer, 68, 173 n.
Apostacy, guilt of, 104.
Apostles, conduct of, 121, 383, 384.
Application of the word to our case, 34, 101, 129.
Arguments in prayer, 101, 207 n. 249, 250, 408, 409, 412, 417.
Ashamed of Christ, 120—123.
Assurance, 13, 14, 109—112, 221, 365—367, 368—370, 458—467.
 ——— known to Old Testament believers, 101, 368, 369.
 ——— loss of, sad effects, 113, 114, 461.
 ——— how maintained, 13, 14, 370, 462 n.
Attainments, humble view of, 14, 15.
Augustine, his conflicts, 80 n.
 ——— conversion, 21 n. 32.
 ——— prayers, 11 n. 149.
 ——— view of prayer, 401 n.
 ——— quotations from. Pref. x. n. 4. 19 n. 226 n. 227 n. 261 n. 269 n. 339 n. 340 n. 355.

Augustine, Scripture fulness, view of, 348 n.
Authority of the word. See Word.
Awful state of wicked. See Wicked.
 ——— world. See World.

B

Backsliding, 358, 475.
 ——— guilt of, 82, 104.
 ——— loss from, 147.
 ——— return from, 359, 360.
Bacon, Lord, quoted, 204 n.
Balaam referred to, 219.
Basil's prayer, 154.
Baxter, quoted, 162.
 ———'s Christian Directory, referred to, 178 n.
Believers cautioned, 82, 83.
 ——— despised by the world, 388—391.
Believer's character, 109, 249.
 ——— comfort in affliction. See Affliction.
 ——— condition, 317, 318.
 ——— confession of Christ, 30—32, 112—114, 120—123, 180—182
 ——— confidence, 82, 198—201, 252, 253, 310—315, 325—329, 465, 496.
 ——— conflicts, 62—65, 71, 75, 80, 295—302, 495, 496.
 ——— cross, 53, 133, 134, 185, 426—430.
 ——— delight in the word, 32, 33, 245, 339—341, 386—388, 395, 441.
 ——— encouragement. See Encouragement.
 ——— liberty in the ways of God, 83—85, 118—120.
 ——— love of the brethren, 163—165, 203—217.
 ——— need of mercy, 333, 334.
 ——— persecutions, 53, 133, 134, 185, 211, 232, 427, 428, 439.
 ——— plea for mercy, 247, 334.
 ——— portion, 148—150, 290—292.
 ——— praises. See Praise.
 ——— prayers. See Prayer.
 ——— preciousness in sight of God, 391.
 ——— prospects, 160.
 ——— resolutions, 277—279.
 ——— security, 236, 251—253.
 ——— steadfastness, 81—83, 230, 428—430, 453, 454.
 ——— trials of faith, 222—225, 329—333.
 ——— walk, 469, 470.
Bernard quoted, 88, 119 n. 227.
Beza referred to, 21.
Bondage, spirit of, 448.
Boston quoted, 38.

Bradford's Letters, 411 n.
 ————— referred to, 396 n.
 Brainerd's Life, 384, 385, 387, 390.
 Brookes's Works, 72 n.
 Buchanan, Rev. Dr., referred to,
 347 n.
 Bunyan quoted, 98, 103, 160, 449.

C

Cadogan, life of, 405 n.
 Calvin on Psalm cxix. quoted, Pref.
 ix. n.
 —————'s Institutes referred to, 174 n.
 Cecil quoted, 309, 350 n.
 Character of God. See God.
 ————— his judgments. See
 Judgments.
 ————— his testimonies. See
 Testimonies.
 Characteristics of Psalm cxix. Pref.
 viii.
 Charnock quoted, 183.
 Choice of the Gospel, 77—80, 482—
 485.
 ————— cost counted, 427, 428.
 ————— help in making, 485.
 ————— of Mary, 77.
 ————— of Paul, 77, 158.
 Christians. See Believers.
 ————— love of early, 214.
 ————— their trials, 159.
 Cicero quoted, 38.
 Circumstances of temptation. See
 Temptation.
 Cleansing power of the Word. See
 Word.
 Cleaving to God, 80—82, 236, 237,
 428—430.
 Collatia, people of, 120 n.
 Comfort of Word, 131—133.
 Coming of Christ, believer looking
 for, 221, 223, 224, 372, 451.
 Compassion to sinners, 138—140,
 372—377, 425—427, 430—432.
 Condition of the believer. See Bel-
 iever.
 Confession of Christ. See Believer.
 ————— comfort of, 115, 116.
 ————— young persons encour-
 aged to, 122, 123.
 Confidence, Christian. See Believer.
 ————— distinguished from pha-
 risaical, 327.
 ————— dying hours, 222, 223,
 286, 287, 289, 290, 409, 410, 415.
 ————— excitement to, 199—201.
 Conflict, spiritual. See Believer.
 Conformity to the world, 304—309.
 ————— danger of 163, 164, 307,
 306.
 ————— deceitfulness of, 307.
 Confusion of enemies, prayer for,
 211—213, 231—233, 335—338.
 Conscience, 325.
 ————— good, 325—327.
 ————— scrupulous, 174 — 178,
 280, 481.
 ————— seared, 187—189.

Conscience, tender, 272.
 ————— unenlightened, 178, 179.
 Consideration, 152—154.
 ————— God's, of his people,
 433.
 Contrition, sweetness of, 72, 105.
 Conversation, daily, 115.
 ————— religious, 71, 113—115.
 Conversion of Jews, 243.
 ————— world, *ibid.*
 Convictions, immediate attention to,
 155—158.
 Corruption of nature, 5, 20.
 ————— from youth, 20.
 Counsel of Christ. See Jesus Christ.
 ————— word, 57—61.
 Covenant of grace, emblem of, 241.
 Covetousness, 92, 95.
 ————— danger of, 93, 94.
 ————— mortification of, *ibid.*
 Cowper, Bp. quoted, Pref. x. n.
 ————— W. quoted, 310 n.
 Cranmer quoted, 441 n.
 Creation of man, 196.
 ————— end of, 197, 198.
 ————— new, on heart, 5, 6, 97.
 ————— works of, 238, 239.
 Cross, taken up. See Believer.
 ————— of Christ. See Jesus Christ.
 ————— power of, 264.
 Curse of sin, 24.
 Cyprian's Epistles quoted, 124 n.
 432 n.

D

Danger, temporal, 286, 287.
 ————— of pride, 50—52.
 ————— of prosperity, 179, 180.
 ————— of self-confidence, 315.
 ————— of walking in our own
 light, 60.
 ————— of worldly conformity. See
 Conformity
 Daniel in Babylon, 20, 56, 404.
 ————— snare laid for, 288.
 ————— steadfastness, *ibid.*
 David, character of, Pref. i. ii.
 ————— awe of God's word, 439.
 ————— concern for his honour, 102.
 ————— dying advice to Solomon, 58.
 ————— dying consolations, 222, 223.
 ————— fear of temptation, 96.
 ————— life endangered, 286.
 ————— persecutions, 55, 439.
 ————— praises, times of, 158, 161,
 447, 448.
 ————— prayer, habit of, 404, 408.
 ————— promise secured, 435, 436.
 ————— submission, 202, 203.
 ————— wisdom, 259, 260.
 Deadness in prayer, 238.
 Deceitfulness of worldly conformity.
 See Conformity.
 Defilement, encouragement under, 3.
 Delight, spiritual, 91, 92, 485—491.
 ————— in the ways of God, 37—39,
 105, 123—125, 140—142.
 ————— in the Word of God. See
 Believer.

- Deliverance from trial, 364—367.
 ————— from vain thoughts,
 298—300.
 ————— of children of Israel,
 137, 435.
 ————— deluge, record of, 137.
 Desertion, state of, 16—19.
 ————— causes of, 17.
 ————— encouragements under,
 18, 19, 329—331.
 ————— Jesus Christ in state of.
 See Jesus Christ.
 Desire, spiritual, 47, 48, 105—107,
 353—357.
 ————— hindrances to, 48.
 ————— object of, 222—224.
 Difference between God's people and
 the world, 317—319.
 Diodati quoted, 166.
 Divine teaching, 42—44, 67, 69, 70,
 80, 164, 184.
 ————— by affliction, 189,
 190.
 ————— blessing of, 265,
 267.
 Dominion of sin, 360—362.
 Dying hour, confidence in. See
 Confidence.
 ————— preparation for, 287.

E

- Early Christians. See Christian.
 ————— rising, 405, 406.
 Edwards' (President), resolution,
 68 n.
 ————— view of false humility,
 389 n.
 ————— view of Psalm cxix. Pref.
 vii. n.
 Ejaculatory prayer, 173 n. 401 n.
 Elijah's zeal, 383.
 Elisha's faith, 411.
 Emblem of the covenant of grace,
 241.
 Emptiness of the world, 254.
 Encouragement of the believer, 251,
 253.
 ————— to confession of
 Christ, 122, 123.
 ————— under the cross, 53.
 ————— deadness of prayer,
 64.
 ————— defilement of sin, 3.
 ————— desertion. See De-
 sertion.
 ————— desire spiritual, 106,
 107.
 ————— love of the brethren,
 165.
 ————— under failure of me-
 mory, 247, 248.
 ————— to perseverance, 87,
 88, 294.
 ————— under power of sin,
 73—75.
 ————— to praise, 449, 450.
 ————— to return to God, 493,
 494.

- Encouragement under vain
 thoughts, 298—302.
 End of Creation. See Creation.
 Enemies, prayer for confusion of.
 See Confusion.
 Enmity to the people of God, 211,
 251, 410.
 ————— overruled for good, 184,
 185, 428—430.
 Enthusiasm, 351, 352.
 Error of heart, 50, 318.
 Eternity, nearness of, 289.
 Evangelical religion, happiness of,
 Pref. viii 123—125.
 Example of Jesus Christ. See Jesus
 Excitement to christian confidence
 See Confidence.
 Expectations of faith, 40, 41, 84.
 Experience of Old Testament be-
 lievers, Pref. in. vi. 99, 368, 369
 ————— identical with New Tes-
 tament, Pref. iii.—vi. 455.
 ————— of Jacob. See Jacob.
 ————— of Job. See Job.
 ————— of Jonah. See Jonah.
 ————— of Paul. See Paul.
 ————— witness of the truth of
 Scripture, 437, 438.
 Extension of the kingdom of Christ,
 243.

F

- Faith, acts of, 129—131, 455, 468.
 ————— ground of, 243.
 ————— practical principle, 455, 460,
 461.
 ————— trembling, 456, 457.
 ————— trials of. See Trials.
 ————— in the commandments, 179.
 ————— promise, 169—171, 207 n.
 ————— of Old Testament believers,
 Pref. iii. 368, 369.
 Faithfulness of God. See God.
 False humility. See Humility.
 ————— ways, 271, 272, 311—314. See
 Lying.
 ————— zeal. See Zeal.
 Favour, sense of, 150—152, 204, 208,
 357—360. See Assurance.
 ————— benefit of, 370.
 ————— means of obtaining, 371.
 Fear of God, 99.
 ————— of God consistent with assur-
 ance, 101, 440 n.
 ————— fruit of assurance, 223, 465, n
 ————— of the judgments of God, 320—
 324.
 Fellowship, Christian, 163—165, 213
 —217.
 ————— worldly. See Confor-
 mity.
 First-love, loss of, 487, 488.
 Forbearance, Christian, 213—216.
 Foreknowledge of God. See God.
 Forgiveness of God. See God.
 Foundation of the word of God. See
 Word.
 Franck, Professor, quoted, 36 n.

Free will off-rings, 284—286.

Fulness of Scripture. See Word.

G

Gardiner, Col. referred to, 440.

Glover, Martyr, referred to, 331 n.

God, his character, 378, 379.

—faithfulness, 169, 172, 200, 210—212.

—foreknowledge, 242, 414.

—forgiveness, 46.

—goodness, 182—185.

—mercy, 165, 168.

—righteousness, 378, 379.

—unchangeableness, 241, 242.

—ways, 201, 202, 379, 380.

—the portion of his people, 143—150.

Good Conscience. See Conscience.

Grace, power of, 9—12.

—quickenng. See Quickening.

—seasonable, 409, 410.

Gracious uses of affliction. See Affliction.

Greenham, referred to, 173 n. 296, 297 n.

Gregory Nazianzen, referred to, 78 n.

Grimshawe's *Life*, referred to, 277 n.

Gurnal quoted, 246 n.

H

Habitual actings of faith, 457.

Halybuton's *Life*, Pref. vii. n.

Happiness of religion. 1 *tel.* iv. 123—125.

Harmony of Scripture, 10, 11.

Hatred of sin, 271, 272, 342—344, 444—447.

Heart, tender, 188.

Heaven, service of, 116, 117, 426, 441.

Helps to Memory, 39.

Henry P. Catholic title of, 244 n.

—views of Psalm cix. Pref. x.

Hervey quoted, 258 n.

Hess, Antistes, referred to, 348 n.

Hiding of word in the heart. See Word.

Hiding-place, Jesus Christ. See Jesus Christ.

Hindrances to the light of the Gospel, 350, 351.

—love of the brethren, 214, 215.

—prayer, 473.

—progress 84, 175.

History of the Bible, importance of, 135—138.

Holiness of the word. See Word.

Hope, Christian, 223, 224.

—fruit of Faith, 446.

—practical principle, 460, 461.

—in God's salvation, 455—461.

—in God's word, 129—131, 223, 224, 304, 407, 408.

—Jesus Christ the Christian's 311.

Horne, Bishop, quoted, 1, 34 n. 386, 467.

Horne, Hartwell, quoted, Pref. ix.

Horsley, Bishop, quoted, 3 n. 321 n.

Howe, quoted, 183, 184, n. 217. •

Humility, 15.

—false, 389.

Hypocrisy, 12, 13, 217—220, 342—344.

I

Identity of experience of Old and New Testaments. See Experience.

Illumination, Divine. See Teaching.

Inability, moral, 10.

Indifference to the wonders of the Bible, 347.

Indwelling sin. See Believer's Conflicts.

—encouragement under. See Encouragement.

Infidelity, preservation against, 260, 261, 437.

Integrity, Christian, 219—221.

Intercession of the Spirit, 106.

Interest, personal, in Christ, 108—110.

—in the promise. See Promises.

Isaiah *hui.* 246 n.

Israel, Children of, their exodus, 137, 435.

—manna, 437, 438.

J

Jacob's dying hour, 222.

—experience, 169, 170.

—faith in the promises, 130 n. 278.

Jephthah's vow, 188. •

Jerom. • quoted

Jesus Christ, advocacy of, 285, 298, 301, 315, 400, 410, 418—421, 472.

—government of, 392.

Jesus's compassion for sinners, 372, 432.

—conflicts, 74, 329.

—counsel, 349.

—delight in his work, 92, 355.

—example, 31, 92, 122, 134, 183, 212, 287, 363, 384, 388, 390, 404, 408.

—perseverance, 82.

—prayers, 209, 211, 404, 405, 432.

—preaching, 31.

—reproach, 56, 134, 390.

—sufferings, 53, 54, 140, 220, 416.

—support, 74, 144, 412.

—sympathy, 228, 229, 281, 394, 395, 416—418.

—zeal, 384, 426, 432.

Jesus Christ, the Christian's hiding-place, 302—304.

—hope, 311.

—portion, 148—150.

—shepherd, 494, 495—497.

—a stranger.

—surety, 326—329.

Jewish Expositor quoted, 348 n.
 ——— Rabbi, 192 n.
 Jews, conversion of, 243.
 ——— reverence for the word of God, 441, n.
 Joash, his history, 435, 436.
 Job's affliction, 159, 227, 229.
 ——— conflicts, 354.
 ——— resignation, 202, 229.
 ——— steadfastness, 229.
 Jonah's experience, 245.
 Joseph referred to, 339.
 Josiah referred to, 20, 439.
 Judas referred to, 218, 219.
 Judgment, good, the gift of God, 173.
 ——— of God, 199.
 ——— executed upon the ungodly, 317—319, 335, 337.
 ——— subjects of praise, 137, 138, 161—163, 450, 451.

K

Keeping the testimonies, 3—5, 8—12, 347—349, 403, 462—468.
 Kingdom of Christ, extension of, 243.
 Knowledge, spiritual, 174, 175. See Understanding.

L

Law of God, love to, 257—259, 433, 434, 451—453, 462—468.
 Law of God, spirituality of, 254—256, 340.
 Leighton quoted, 231, 232, 252.
 Liberty of the ways of God, 118—120.
 Lies against the people of God, 185—187.
 Life spiritual, 209, 210, 399, 491—493.
 Light of the Spirit, 351, 352
 ——— Word, 271—276, 349—353.
 ——— danger of walking in our own, 60
 ——— hindrances to, 349, 350.
 Liturgy referred to, 450.
 Livy quoted, 120 n.
 Locke quoted, 386.
 Love of the brethren. See Believer.
 ——— law. See Law.
 ——— constraining, 42, 453.
 Luther quoted, 105 n. 262 n. 476.
 ——— resistance of temptation, 402 n
 ——— at school. 190.
 ——— supplication, spirit of, 402 n. 406, 407 n.
 Lying ways, 74—77, 444—447.
 ——— origin of, 76.
 ——— resistance of, 446, 447.

M

Man, creation of. See Creation.
 ——— redemption of. See Redemption
 Manton, Dr. referred to, 68 n.
 Martyn, H. quoted. Pref. x, n. (2), 257 n. 323 n. 336 n. 347 n. 387, 432.
 Martyrs referred to, 396 n.
 Mary's choice 77.
 Mather, Cotton, quoted, 115 n.
 Matthew, ch. xi. ver. 28, 246 n.
 Meditation, 126—128, 210, 212, 213, 258, 259, 261, 407, 408.

Memory, encouragement under weakness of, 39, 248.
 ——— helps to, 39.
 Mercy of God. See God.
 ——— believer's need of, 333, 334.
 ——— great, 424.
 ——— tender, 208, 209, 424.
 Midnight employment and support 161—163,
 Milner quoted, 217 n.
 Misery of sin, 24.
 Missionary encouragements, 243.
 ——— feelings, 376, 377.
 Monica quoted, 207 n.
 Moral Inability. See Inability.
 Morning Exercises referred to, 215
 Mortification of the flesh, 161.
 Moses's zeal, 383

N

Name of God, revealed, 141.
 ——— support to Jesus from. See Jesus Christ.
 ——— support to the people of God from, 143—145.
 Nature, corruption of, 5, 20.
 ——— renewal of, 5, 6
 Nearness of eternity, 299.
 ——— of God to his people, 411—413.
 ——— support to Jesus from. See Jesus Christ.
 Night-season, comfort for, 143.

O

Obedience, christian, 7, 8.
 ——— happiness of, 142—145
 ——— obligations to, 7.
 Offering, free will. See Free-will Offerings.
 Owen, (Dr.) quoted, 20 n. 347, 441 n.

P

Paul, his boldness for Christ, 121.
 ——— choice of the gospel, 77, 158.
 ——— Christian experience, Pref. iii. iv.
 ——— fervency of spirit, 83, 355.
 ——— pride, temptation to, 51.
 ——— steadfastness, 287, 288, 429.
 ——— tenderness of spirit, 373, 374.
 ——— zeal, 384.
 Peace of the gospel, 451—455.
 Pearce, life of, 277 n.
 People of God. See Believer.
 Perfection, christian, 468 n.
 Persecution. See Believer
 ——— comfort under, 232, 233, 394—397.
 ——— how to abide, 133—135.
 Perseverance desired, 87.
 ——— encouragement to, 83, 283, 294.
 ——— importance of, 80—83.
 ——— secured, 88, 294, 429, 430.
 ——— test of, 287—289.
 Personal interest in the gospel. See Interest.
 Peter's denial of Christ, 439.
 ——— determination to confess Christ, *ibid.*

- Peter's self-confidence, 315.
 Philpot referred to, 396 n.
 Pilgrim's Song, 110—112.
 ——— spirit, importance of, 45, 46.
 Pleasures of sin contrasted, 123, 124.
 Poor, religion of, 349, 350.
 Portion of the people of God, 148—150.
 Praise, 27—29, 417—451, 477—479.
 ——— acceptableness of, 27, 28.
 ——— encouragement to, 419—451.
 ——— poverty of, 27, 28.
 ——— subjects of, 449, 450.
 ——— world of, 450.
 Prayer, 400—404, 474—476.
 ——— answers to, 67, 173 n.
 ——— dulness, reason of, 402, 473.
 ——— ejaculation, 173 n. 401 n.
 ——— object of, 401 n.
 ——— seasons of, 404—406.
 ——— secret, 471.
 ——— example of Jesus in. See Jesus Christ.
 ——— temptation resisted by, 402 n.
 Preciousness of the believer. See Believer.
 Pride, hateful to God, 50, 51.
 ——— spiritual, temptation to, 51.
 Princes, persecution of, 55, 56, 439.
 Progress, christian, 83—85.
 Promise of Spirit. See Spirit.
 ——— tender heart. See Heart.
 Promises, interest in, how distinguished, 273—276.
 ——— pleading in prayer, 129—131, 207, 475, 476.
 Prospects of believer. See Believer.
 Prosperity, danger of, 179, 180.
 Psalm xxiii. quoted, 140, 141.
 ——— cxix. view of, Pref. viii. ix.
- Q
- Quickening grace, 11, 63, 107, 237—239, 103, 120, 421, 425, 426, 434.
 ——— power of the word, 131—133, 216, 217.
- R
- Rabbi, Jewish, 195 n.
 Record of trials of God's people, 395.
 Redemption, work of, 197, 198, 338, 315, 316, 414.
 Religion, evangelical happiness of, Pref. viii. 123—195.
 ——— of poor. See Poor.
 Religious conversation. See Conversation.
 Reproach. See Jesus Christ.
 ——— of the Cross, 53—55.
 ——— of sin, 102.
 Resistance of temptation. See Temptation.
 Respect to the Word of God. See Word.
 Reverence to the Word. See Word.
 Righteous character of God. See God.
 ——— testimonies of God, 379, 380, 397, 398.
 ——— of the ways of God, 201, 202.
 Rising early, 404—406.
- Rivet, Dr referred to, 140 n.
 Rutherford's Letters quoted, 131 n. 169 n.
- S
- Salvation, what it is, 110, 111, 485, 486.
 ——— object of desire, 108.
 ——— personal interest in, 108, 109.
 ——— work of. See Redemption.
 Saul referred to, 218, 396.
 Savage, Mrs. Preface x. n.
 Scott referred to, 166 n. 168 n. 170 n. 297 n. 414 n. 419 n.
 Scriptures, Holy. See Word of God.
 Scrupulous Conscience. See Conscience.
 Seared Conscience. See Conscience.
 Season of Prayer. See Prayer.
 Seasonableness of grace. See Grace.
 Security of the people of God. See Believer.
 Self-deception, 16, 37.
 ——— dedication, 276—281, 285, 286.
 ——— denial, 161, 162.
 ——— examination, Pref. vi. vii.
 Seneca quoted, 118 n.
 Sense of Favour. See Favour.
 Servant of God, character of, 100
 ——— privilege of, 331, 335.
 Service of heaven. See Heaven.
 Shadrach referred to, 20, 439.
 Simplicity, Christian, 16, 309—315.
 Sin, aggravation of, 21.
 ——— Conflict with. See Believer.
 ——— curse of, 24.
 ——— dominion of, 350—362.
 ——— misery of, 21.
 ——— pleasures of, 123, 124.
 ——— hateful to the people of God, 342—344, 411—447.
 Sincerely, godly, 12, 13, 341—344.
 Sorrow, godly, 71, 72.
 ——— worldly. See Affliction.
 Spirit, intercession of, 106.
 ——— light of. See Light.
 ——— Promise of, 3, 4, 69, 70.
 Spiritual Activity. See Activity.
 ——— bondage, 448.
 ——— life. See Life.
 ——— light. See Light.
 ——— pride. See Pride.
 ——— understanding. See Understanding.
 Spirituality of the Law. See Law
 State of the Wicked. See Wicked.
 ——— world. See World.
 Steadfastness of the believer. See Believer.
 Steel's Antidote to distraction—quoted, 300.
 Stranger, character of Christ as. See Jesus Christ.
 ——— Christians, 45 n.
 Structure of Psalm cxix. Pref. viii.
 Submission to the word of God, 260, 261, 398, 436, 437.
 Sufferings of Jesus Christ. See Jesus Christ.
 Sumner's (Bp.) Evidences quoted, 118 n.

Support vouchsafed to Jesus Christ under sufferings. See Jesus Christ.
 ——— to people of God under trouble, 281—284.

——— from the word of God. See Word.

Surrender of all, 120, 280, 285, 286.

Suretyship of Jesus Christ. See Jesus Christ.

Sweetness of the word. See Word.

T

Taylor (Bp) quoted, 174 n. 175 n.

Teaching of God. See Divine Teaching.

——— prayers for, 29, 42, 66, 86, 88, 165, 172, 182, 333.

Temptation, circumstances of, 96—98.

——— resistance of, 97—99, 131, 134, 397 n. 401 n.

——— watchfulness in, 97.

Tender Conscience. See Conscience.

——— heat, promise of. See Heart.

——— mercies of God. See Mercy.

Tertullian quoted, 317 n.

Testimonies of God, what, 3.

——— obedience required to, 3, 4, 462—469.

——— preciousness of, 32—34, 290—292.

Thomas à Kempis quoted, 410.

Thoughts, vain. See Vain.

Threatenings of the word, how to bear, 276.

Trials of faith, 225—227, 329—333.

——— of the world, 159.

——— deliverance from, 361—367.

Truth of God's word. See Word.

——— Gospel, 393.

U

Unbelief rebuked, 169—172.

Unchangeableness of God. See God.

Unfiled way, 1.

——— privileges of, 2.

Understanding, spiritual, 197, 260, 267, 270, 398, 399.

Unenlightened Conscience. See Conscience.

Ungodly, duty to, 432.

Upholding grace, 310—315.

Usher (Archbishop) quoted, 481 n.

V

Vain thoughts, 295.

——— distress of, 296.

——— thoughts, encouragement under 297—302.

Vanity of the world, 96.

——— resistance to, 97.

Venn, Rev. H. quoted, Pref. x.

Vows, Religious, 276—280.

——— advantages of, 277, 278.

——— evangelical character of, 278.

W

Wanting faith. See Trials of Faith.

Walking before God. See Believer.

Watchfulness, importance of, 96.

Ways of God, Liberty of. See Liberty.

——— pleasures of, 123—125.

——— lying. See False Ways and Lying.

Weariness in duties consistent with grace, 107.

Wholeness of heart, 4, 23, 151, 152, 186. See Integrity.

Wicked, character of, 410, 422, 423.

——— compassion due to. See Compassion.

——— condition of, 317—319, 423—424.

Wisdom, spiritual. See Spiritual Understanding.

Word of God, its application to our need, 31, 131 n.

——— authority of, 259, 260, 437, 439—441.

——— cleansing power of, 20, 21, 386—388.

Word, deight of Believer. See Believer.

——— foundation of, 241—243, 413—415.

——— fulness of, 69, 87, 317.

——— harmony of, 10, 11.

——— hid in the heart, 24—27.

——— holiness of, 262—265, 386—388.

——— hope of believer. See Hope light of. See Light.

——— names of, Preface, viii. ix.

——— quickening power of. See Quickening.

——— respect to, 59.

——— reverence of, 239, 439.

——— riches of, 290—292, 339—341.

——— support of, 131—133, 243—246, 391—396.

——— sweetness of, 267—270.

——— truth of, 413—415, 430—433, 435—438.

——— wonders of, 42—44, 345—347 n.

Works of Creation. See Creation.

——— new creation, 5, 6, 197.

——— Redemption. See Redemption.

World, awful state of, 139, 140, 370, 374, 375.

——— compassion due to, 319, 320, 375.

——— emptiness of, 25.

Worldly Conformity. See Conformity.

——— sorrow. See Affliction.

Y

Young Christian encouraged, 452, 453.

——— warned, 427—429.

——— persons addressed, 122, 123.

Youth—corruption of heart from. See Corruption.

Z

Zeal, Christian, 335—337, 383—386, 432.

——— false, 381, 382.

