

Morning by Morning

By

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VOLUME FOUR

*He wakeneth morning by morning,
he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.
Isaiah 50:4*

Note: This devotional can be accessed at: www.lifebpc.com/devotions

The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

Song of Solomon 7:13

THE spouse desires to give to Jesus all that she produces. Our heart has “all manner of pleasant fruits,” both “old and new,” and they are laid up for our Beloved. At this rich autumnal season of fruit, let us survey our stores. We have *new* fruits. We desire to feel new life, new joy, new gratitude; we wish to make new resolves and carry them out by new labours; our heart blossoms with new prayers, and our soul is pledging herself to new efforts. But we have some *old* fruits too. There is our first love: a choice fruit that! and Jesus delights in it. There is our first faith: that simple faith by which, having nothing, we became possessors of all things. There is our joy when first we knew the Lord: let us revive it. We have our old remembrances of the promises. How faithful has God been! In sickness, how softly did He make our bed! In deep waters, how placidly did He buoy us up! In the flaming furnace, how graciously did He deliver us. Old fruits, indeed! We have many of them, for His mercies have been more than the hairs of our head. Old sins we must regret, but then we have had repentances which He has given us, by which we have wept our way to the cross, and learned the merit of His blood. We have fruits, this morning, both new and old; but here is the point—*they are all laid up for Jesus*. Truly, those are the best and most acceptable services in which Jesus is the solitary aim of the soul, and His glory, without any admixture whatever, the end of all our efforts. Let our many fruits be laid up only for our Beloved; let us display them when He is with us, and not hold them up before the gaze of men. Jesus, we will turn the key in our garden door, and none shall enter to rob Thee of one good fruit from the soil which Thou hast watered with Thy bloody sweat. Our all shall be Thine, Thine only, O Jesus, our Beloved!

*For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye
heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;
Colossians 1:5*

OUR hope in Christ for the future is the mainspring and the mainstay of our joy here. It will animate our hearts to think often of heaven, for all that we can desire is promised there. Here we are weary and toilworn, but yonder is the land of *rest* where the sweat of labour shall no more bedew the worker's brow, and fatigue shall be forever banished. To those who are weary and spent, the word "rest" is full of heaven. We are always in the field of battle; we are so tempted within, and so molested by foes without, that we have little or no peace; but in heaven we shall enjoy the *victory*, when the banner shall be waved aloft in triumph, and the sword shall be sheathed, and we shall hear our Captain say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We have suffered bereavement after bereavement, but we are going to the land of the *immortal* where graves are unknown things. Here sin is a constant grief to us, but there we shall be perfectly *holy*, for there shall by no means enter into that kingdom anything which defileth. Hemlock springs not up in the furrows of celestial fields. Oh! is it not joy, that you are not to be in banishment forever, that you are not to dwell eternally in this wilderness, but shall soon inherit Canaan? Nevertheless let it never be said of us, that we are dreaming about the *future* and forgetting the *present*, let the future sanctify the present to highest uses. Through the Spirit of God the hope of heaven is the most potent force for the product of virtue; it is a fountain of joyous effort, it is the corner stone of cheerful holiness. The man who has this hope in him goes about his work with vigour, for the joy of the Lord is his strength. He fights against temptation with ardour, for the hope of the next world repels the fiery darts of the adversary. He can labour without present reward, for he looks for a reward in the world to come.

*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister
for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

Hebrews 1:14

ANGELS are the unseen attendants of the saints of God; they bear us up in their hands, lest we dash our foot against a stone. Loyalty to their Lord leads them to take a deep interest in the children of His love; they rejoice over the return of the prodigal to his father's house below, and they welcome the advent of the believer to the King's palace above. In olden times the sons of God were favoured with their visible appearance, and at this day, although unseen by us, heaven is still opened, and the angels of God ascend and descend upon the Son of man, that they may visit the heirs of salvation. Seraphim still fly with live coals from off the altar to touch the lips of men greatly beloved. If our eyes could be opened, we should see horses of fire and chariots of fire about the servants of the Lord; for we have come to an innumerable company of angels, who are all watchers and protectors of the seed-royal. Spenser's line is no poetic fiction, where he sings—

“How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The flitting skies, like flying pursuivant
Against foul fiends to aid us militant!”

To what dignity are the chosen elevated when the brilliant courtiers of heaven become their willing servitors! Into what communion are we raised since we have intercourse with spotless celestials! How well are we defended since all the twenty-thousand chariots of God are armed for our deliverance! To whom do we owe all this? Let the Lord Jesus Christ be for ever endeared to us, for through Him we are made to sit in heavenly places far above principalities and powers. He it is whose camp is round about them that fear Him; He is the true Michael whose foot is upon the dragon. All hail, Jesus! thou Angel of Jehovah's presence, to Thee this family offers its morning vows.

*But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD,
not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass,
that at evening time it shall be light.*

Zechariah 14:7

OFTENTIMES we look forward with forebodings to *the time of old age*, forgetful that at eventide it shall be light. To many saints, old age is the choicest season in their lives. A balmier air fans the mariner's cheek as he nears the shore of immortality, fewer waves ruffle his sea, quiet reigns, deep, still and solemn. From the altar of age the flashes of the fire of youth are gone, but the more real flame of earnest feeling remains. The pilgrims have reached the land Beulah, that happy country, whose days are as the days of heaven upon earth. Angels visit it, celestial gales blow over it, flowers of paradise grow in it, and the air is filled with seraphic music. Some dwell here for years, and others come to it but a few hours before their departure, but it is an Eden on earth. We may well long for the time when we shall recline in its shady groves and be satisfied with hope until the time of fruition comes. The setting sun seems larger than when aloft in the sky, and a splendour of glory tinges all the clouds which surround his going down. Pain breaks not the calm of the sweet twilight of age, for strength made perfect in weakness bears up with patience under it all. Ripe fruits of choice experience are gathered as the rare repast of life's evening, and the soul prepares itself for rest.

The Lord's people shall also enjoy light in *the hour of death*. Unbelief laments; the shadows fall, the night is coming, existence is ending. Ah no, crieth faith, the night is far spent, the true day is at hand. Light is come, the light of immortality, the light of a Father's countenance. Gather up thy feet in the bed, see the waiting bands of spirits! Angels waft thee away. Farewell, beloved one, thou art gone, thou wavest thine hand. Ah, now it is light. The pearly gates are open, the golden streets shine in the jasper light. We cover our eyes, but thou beholdest the unseen; adieu, brother, thou hast light at even-tide, such as we have not yet.

*And he arose, and did eat and drink,
and went in the strength of that meat
forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.
1 Kings 19:8*

ALL the strength supplied to us by our gracious God is meant for service, not for wantonness or boasting. When the prophet Elijah found the cake baked on the coals, and the cruse of water placed at his head, as he lay under the juniper tree, he was no gentleman to be gratified with dainty fare that he might stretch himself at his ease; far otherwise, he was commissioned to go forty days and forty nights in the strength of it, journeying towards Horeb, the mount of God. When the Master invited the disciples to "Come and dine" with Him, after the feast was concluded He said to Peter, "Feed my sheep"; further adding, "Follow me." Even thus it is with us; we eat the bread of heaven, that we may expend our strength in the Master's service. We come to the passover, and eat of the paschal lamb with loins girt, and staff in hand, so as to start off at once when we have satisfied our hunger. Some Christians are for living *on* Christ, but are not so anxious to live *for* Christ. Earth should be a preparation for heaven; and heaven is the place where saints feast most and work most. They sit down at the table of our Lord, and they serve Him day and night in His temple. They eat of heavenly food and render perfect service. Believer, in the strength you daily gain from Christ labour for Him. Some of us have yet to learn much concerning the design of our Lord in giving us His grace. We are not to retain the precious grains of truth as the Egyptian mummy held the wheat for ages, without giving it an opportunity to grow: we must sow it and water it. Why does the Lord send down the rain upon the thirsty earth, and give the genial sunshine? Is it not that these may all help the fruits of the earth to yield food for man? Even so the Lord feeds and refreshes our souls that we may afterwards use our renewed strength in the promotion of His glory.

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 4:14

HE who is a believer in Jesus finds enough in his Lord to satisfy him now, and to content him for evermore. The believer is not the man whose days are weary for want of comfort, and whose nights are long from absence of heart-cheering thought, for he finds in religion such a spring of joy, such a fountain of consolation, that he is content and happy. Put him in a dungeon and he will find good company; place him in a barren wilderness, he will eat the bread of heaven; drive him away from friendship, he will meet the “friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Blast all his gourds, and he will find shadow beneath the Rock of Ages; sap the foundation of his earthly hopes, but his heart will still be fixed, trusting in the Lord. The heart is as insatiable as the grave till Jesus enters it, and then it is a cup full to overflowing. There is such a fulness in Christ that He alone is the believer’s all. The true saint is so completely satisfied with the all-sufficiency of Jesus that he thirsts no more—except it be for deeper draughts of the living fountain. In that sweet manner, believer, shalt thou thirst; it shall not be a thirst of pain, but of loving desire; thou wilt find it a sweet thing to be panting after a fuller enjoyment of Jesus’ love. One in days of yore said, “I have been sinking my bucket down into the well full often, but now my thirst after Jesus has become so insatiable, that I long to put the well itself to my lips, and drink right on.” Is this the feeling of thine heart now, believer? Dost thou feel that all thy desires are satisfied in Jesus, and that thou hast no want now, but to know more of Him; and to have closer fellowship with Him? Then come continually to the fountain, and take of the water of life freely. Jesus will never think you take too much, but will ever welcome you, saying, “Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”

And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

Numbers 11:11

OUR heavenly Father sends us frequent troubles *to try our faith*. If our faith be worth anything, it will stand the test. Gilt is afraid of fire, but gold is not: the *paste* gem dreads to be touched by the diamond, but the true jewel fears no test. It is a poor faith which can only trust God when friends are true, the body full of health, and the business profitable; but that is true faith which holds by the Lord's faithfulness when friends are gone, when the body is sick, when spirits are depressed, and the light of our Father's countenance is hidden. A faith which can say, in the direst trouble, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is heaven-born faith. The Lord afflicts His servants *to glorify Himself*, for He is greatly glorified in the graces of His people, which are His own handiwork. When "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope," the Lord is honoured by these growing virtues. We should never know the music of the harp if the strings were left untouched; nor enjoy the juice of the grape if it were not trodden in the winepress; nor discover the sweet perfume of cinnamon if it were not pressed and beaten; nor feel the warmth of fire if the coals were not utterly consumed. The wisdom and power of the great Workman are discovered by the trials through which His vessels of mercy are permitted to pass. Present afflictions *tend also to heighten future joy*. There must be shades in the picture to bring out the beauty of the lights. Could we be so supremely blessed in heaven, if we had not known the curse of sin and the sorrow of earth? Will not peace be sweeter after conflict, and rest more welcome after toil? Will not the recollection of past sufferings enhance the bliss of the glorified? There are many other comfortable answers to the question with which we opened our brief meditation, let us muse upon it all day long.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

Luke 5:4

WE learn from this narrative, the *necessity of human agency*. The draught of fishes was miraculous, yet neither the fisherman nor his boat, nor his fishing tackle were ignored; but all were used to take the fishes. So in the saving of souls, God worketh by means; and while the present economy of grace shall stand, God will be pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. When God worketh without instruments, doubtless He is glorified; but He hath Himself selected the plan of instrumentality as being that by which He is most magnified in the earth. *Means of themselves are utterly unavailing*. “Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing.” What was the reason of this? Were they not fishermen plying their special calling? Verily, they were no raw hands; they understood the work. Had they gone about the toil unskillfully? No. Had they lacked industry? No, they had *toiled*. Had they lacked perseverance? No, they had *toiled all the night*. Was there a deficiency of fish in the sea? Certainly not, for as soon as the Master came, they swam to the net in shoals. What, then, is the reason? Is it because there is no power in the means of themselves apart from the presence of Jesus? “Without Him we can do nothing.” But with Christ we can do all things. *Christ’s presence confers success*. Jesus sat in Peter’s boat, and His will, by a mysterious influence, drew the fish to the net. When Jesus is lifted up in His Church, His presence is the Church’s power—the shout of a king is in the midst of her. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” Let us go out this morning on our work of soul fishing, looking up in faith, and around us in solemn anxiety. Let us toil till night comes, and we shall not labour in vain, for He who bids us let down the net, will fill it with fishes.

*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,
and to present you faultless
before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
Jude 24*

IN some sense the path to heaven is very safe, but in other respects there is *no road so dangerous*. It is beset with difficulties. One false step (and how easy it is to take that if grace be absent), and down we go. What a slippery path is that which some of us have to tread! How many times have we to exclaim with the Psalmist, “My feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped.” If we were strong, sure-footed mountaineers, this would not matter so much; but in ourselves, *how weak we are!* In the best roads *we soon falter*, in the smoothest paths we quickly stumble. These feeble knees of ours can scarcely support our tottering weight. A straw may throw us, and a pebble can wound us; we are mere children tremblingly taking our first steps in the walk of faith, our heavenly Father holds us by the arms or we should soon be down. Oh, if we are kept from falling, how must we bless the patient power which watches over us day by day! Think, how prone we are to sin, how apt to choose danger, how strong our tendency to cast ourselves down, and these reflections will make us sing more sweetly than we have ever done, “Glory be to Him, who is able to keep us from falling.” *We have many foes* who try to push us down. The road is rough and we are weak, but in addition to this, enemies lurk in ambush, who rush out when we least expect them, and labour to trip us up, or hurl us down the nearest precipice. Only an Almighty arm can preserve us from these unseen foes, who are seeking to destroy us. Such an arm is engaged for our defence. He is faithful that hath promised, and He is able to keep us from falling, so that with a deep sense of our utter weakness, we may cherish a firm belief in our perfect safety, and say, with joyful confidence,

“Against me earth and hell combine,
But on my side is power divine;
Jesus is all, and He is mine!”

*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,
and to present you faultless
before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
Jude 24*

REVOLVE in your mind that wondrous word, “*faultless!*” We are far off from it now; but as our Lord never stops short of perfection in His work of love, we shall reach it one day. The Saviour who will keep His people to the end, will also present them at last to Himself, as “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.” All the jewels in the Saviour’s crown are of the first water and without a single flaw. All the maids of honour who attend the Lamb’s wife are pure virgins without spot or stain. But how will Jesus make us faultless? He will wash us from our sins in His own blood until we are white and fair as God’s purest angel; and we shall be clothed in His righteousness, that righteousness which makes the saint who wears it positively faultless; yea, perfect in the sight of God. We shall be unblameable and unproveable even in His eyes. His law will not only have no charge against us, but it will be magnified in us. Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit within us will be altogether complete. He will make us so perfectly holy, that we shall have no lingering tendency to sin. Judgment, memory, will—every power and passion shall be emancipated from the thralldom of evil. We shall be holy even as God is holy, and in His presence we shall dwell for ever. Saints will not be out of place in heaven, their beauty will be as great as that of the place prepared for them. Oh the rapture of that hour when the everlasting doors shall be lifted up, and we, being made meet for the inheritance, shall dwell with the saints in light. Sin gone, Satan shut out, temptation past for ever, and ourselves “*faultless!*” before God, this will be heaven indeed! Let us be joyful now as we rehearse the song of eternal praise so soon to roll forth in full chorus from all the blood-washed host; let us copy David’s exultings before the ark as a prelude to our ecstasies before the throne.

Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

Lamentations 3:41

THE act of prayer *teaches us our unworthiness*, which is a very salutary lesson for such proud beings as we are. If God gave us favours without constraining us to pray for them we should never know how poor we are, but a true prayer is an inventory of wants, a catalogue of necessities, a revelation of hidden poverty. While it is an application to divine wealth, it is a confession of human emptiness. The most healthy state of a Christian is to be always empty in self and constantly depending upon the Lord for supplies; to be always poor in self and rich in Jesus; weak as water personally, but mighty through God to do great exploits; and hence the use of prayer, because, while it adores God, it lays the creature where it should be, in the very dust. Prayer is in itself, apart from the answer which it brings, a great benefit to the Christian. As the runner gains strength for the race by daily exercise, so for the great race of life we acquire energy by the hallowed labour of prayer. Prayer plumes the wings of God's young eaglets, that they may learn to mount above the clouds. Prayer girds the loins of God's warriors, and sends them forth to combat with their sinews braced and their muscles firm. An earnest pleader cometh out of his closet, even as the sun ariseth from the chambers of the east, rejoicing like a strong man to run his race. Prayer is that uplifted hand of Moses which routs the Amalekites more than the sword of Joshua; it is the arrow shot from the chamber of the prophet foreboding defeat to the Syrians. Prayer girds human weakness with divine strength, turns human folly into heavenly wisdom, and gives to troubled mortals the peace of God. We know not what prayer cannot do! We thank thee, great God, for the mercy-seat, a choice proof of thy marvellous lovingkindness. Help us to use it aright throughout this day!

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

Psalm 119:15

THERE are times when solitude is better than society, and silence is wiser than speech. We should be better Christians if we were more alone, waiting upon God, and gathering through meditation on His Word spiritual strength for labour in His service. We ought to muse *upon the things of God, because we thus get the real nutriment out of them.* Truth is something like the cluster of the vine: if we would have wine from it, we must bruise it; we must press and squeeze it many times. The bruiser's feet must come down joyfully upon the bunches, or else the juice will not flow; and they must well tread the grapes, or else much of the precious liquid will be wasted. So we must, by meditation, tread the clusters of truth, if we would get the wine of consolation therefrom. Our bodies are not supported by merely taking food into the mouth, but the process which really supplies the muscle, and the nerve, and the sinew, and the bone, is the process of digestion. It is by digestion that the outward food becomes assimilated with the inner life. Our souls are not nourished merely by listening awhile to this, and then to that, and then to the other part of divine truth. Hearing, reading, marking, and learning, all require inwardly digesting to complete their usefulness, and the inward digesting of the truth lies for the most part in meditating upon it. Why is it that some Christians, although they hear many sermons, make but slow advances in the divine life? Because they neglect their closets, and do not thoughtfully meditate on God's Word. They love the wheat, but they do not grind it; they would have the corn, but they will not go forth into the fields to gather it; the fruit hangs upon the tree, but they will not pluck it; the water flows at their feet, but they will not stoop to drink it. From such folly deliver us, O Lord, and be this our resolve this morning, "I will meditate in Thy precepts."

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

2 Corinthians 7:10

GENUINE spiritual mourning for sin is *the work of the Spirit of God*. Repentance is too choice a flower to grow in nature's garden. Pearls grow naturally in oysters, but penitence never shows itself in sinners except divine grace works it in them. If thou hast one particle of real hatred for sin, God must have given it thee, for human nature's thorns never produced a single fig. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

True repentance *has a distinct reference to the Saviour*. When we repent of sin, we must have one eye upon sin and another upon the cross, or it will be better still if we fix both our eyes upon Christ and see our transgressions only, in the light of His love.

True sorrow for sin is *eminently practical*. No man may say he hates sin, if he lives in it. Repentance makes us see the evil of sin, not merely as a theory, but experimentally—as a burnt child dreads fire. We shall be as much afraid of it, as a man who has lately been stopped and robbed is afraid of the thief upon the highway; and we shall shun it—shun it in everything—not in great things only, but in little things, as men shun little vipers as well as great snakes. True mourning for sin will make us very jealous over our tongue, lest it should say a wrong word; we shall be very watchful over our daily actions, lest in anything we offend, and each night we shall close the day with painful confessions of shortcoming, and each morning awaken with anxious prayers, that this day God would hold us up that we may not sin against Him.

Sincere repentance is *continual*. Believers repent until their dying day. This dropping well is not intermittent. Every other sorrow yields to time, but this dear sorrow grows with our growth, and it is so sweet a bitter, that we thank God we are permitted to enjoy and to suffer it until we enter our eternal rest.

*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,
Philippians 3:8*

SPIRITUAL knowledge of Christ will be a *personal* knowledge. I cannot know Jesus through another person's acquaintance with Him. No, I must know Him *myself*; I must know Him on my own account. It will be an *intelligent* knowledge—I must know *Him*, not as the visionary dreams of Him, but as the Word reveals Him. I must know His natures, divine and human. I must know His offices—His attributes—His works—His shame—His glory. I must meditate upon Him until I “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” It will be an *affectionate* knowledge of Him; indeed, if I know Him at all, I must love Him. An ounce of heart knowledge is worth a ton of head learning. Our knowledge of Him will be a *satisfying* knowledge. When I know my Saviour, my mind will be full to the brim—I shall feel that I have that which my spirit panted after. “This is that bread whereof if a man eat he shall never hunger.” At the same time it will be an *exciting* knowledge; the more I know of my Beloved, the more I shall want to know. The higher I climb the loftier will be the summits which invite my eager footsteps. I shall want the more as I get the more. Like the miser's treasure, my gold will make me covet more. To conclude; this knowledge of Christ Jesus will be a most *happy* one; in fact, so elevating, that sometimes it will completely bear me up above all trials, and doubts, and sorrows; and it will, while I enjoy it, make me something more than “Man that is born of woman, who is of few days, and full of trouble”; for it will fling about me the immortality of the ever living Saviour, and gird me with the golden girdle of His eternal joy. Come, my soul, sit at Jesus's feet and learn of Him all this day.

*But who may abide the day of his coming?
and who shall stand when he appeareth?
for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:
Malachi 3:23*

HIS first coming was without external pomp or show of power, and yet in truth there were few who could abide its testing might. Herod and all Jerusalem with him were stirred at the news of the wondrous birth. Those who supposed themselves to be waiting for Him, showed the fallacy of their professions by rejecting Him when He came. His life on earth was a winnowing fan, which tried the great heap of religious profession, and few enough could abide the process. But what will His second advent be? What sinner can endure to think of it? "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." When in His humiliation He did but say to the soldiers, "I am He," they fell backward; what will be the terror of His enemies when He shall more fully reveal Himself as the "*I am*?" His death shook earth and darkened heaven, what shall be the dreadful splendour of that day in which as the living Saviour, He shall summon the quick and dead before Him? O that the terrors of the Lord would persuade men to forsake their sins and kiss the Son lest He be angry! Though a lamb, He is yet the lion of the tribe of Judah, rending the prey in pieces; and though He breaks not the bruised reed, yet will He break His enemies with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. None of His foes shall bear up before the tempest of His wrath, or hide themselves from the sweeping hail of His indignation; but His beloved bloodwashed people look for His appearing with joy, and hope to abide it without fear: to them He sits as a refiner even now, and when He has tried them they shall come forth as gold. Let us search ourselves this morning and make our calling and election sure, so that the coming of the Lord may cause no dark forebodings in our mind. O for grace to cast away all hypocrisy, and to be found of Him sincere and without rebuke in the day of His appearing.

Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

John 21:12

IN these words the believer is invited to a holy *nearness to Jesus*. “Come and dine,” implies the same table, the same meat; ay, and sometimes it means to sit side by side, and lean our head upon the Saviour’s bosom. It is being brought into the banqueting-house, where waves the banner of redeeming love. “Come and dine,” gives us a vision of *union with Jesus*, because the only food that we can feast upon when we dine with Jesus is *Himself*. Oh, what union is this! It is a depth which reason cannot fathom, that we thus feed upon Jesus. “He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.” It is also an invitation to enjoy *fellowship with the saints*. Christians may differ on a variety of points, but they have all one spiritual appetite; and if we cannot all feel alike, we can all *feed* alike on the bread of life sent down from heaven. At the table of fellowship with Jesus we are one bread and one cup. As the loving cup goes round we pledge one another heartily therein. Get nearer to Jesus, and you will find yourself linked more and more in spirit to all who are like yourself, supported by the same heavenly manna. If we were more near to Jesus we should be more near to one another. We likewise see in these words the *source of strength* for every Christian. To look at Christ is to live, but for strength to serve Him you must “come and dine.” We labour under much unnecessary weakness on account of neglecting this percept of the Master. We none of us need to put ourselves on low diet; on the contrary, we should fatten on the marrow and fatness of the gospel that we may accumulate strength therein, and urge every power to its full tension in the Master’s service. Thus, then, if you would realize *nearness to Jesus*, *union with Jesus*, *love to His people* and *strength from Jesus*, “come and dine” with Him by faith.

And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.

1 Samuel 27:1

THE thought of David's heart at this time was a *false* thought, because he certainly had no ground for thinking that God's anointing him by Samuel was intended to be left as an empty unmeaning act. On no one occasion had the Lord deserted His servant; he had been placed in perilous positions very often, but not one instance had occurred in which divine interposition had not delivered him. The trials to which he had been exposed had been varied; they had not assumed one form only, but many—yet in every case He who sent the trial had also graciously ordained a way of escape. David could not put his finger upon any entry in his diary, and say of it, "Here is evidence that the Lord will forsake me," for the entire tenor of his past life proved the very reverse. He should have argued from what God had done for him, that God would be his defender still. But is it not just in the same way that we doubt God's help? Is it not *mistrust without a cause*? Have we ever had the shadow of a reason to doubt our Father's goodness? Have not His lovingkindnesses been marvellous? Has He *once* failed to justify our trust? Ah, no! our God has not left us at any time. We have had dark nights, but the star of love has shone forth amid the blackness; we have been in stern conflicts, but over our head He has held aloft the shield of our defence. We have gone through many trials, but never to our detriment, always to our advantage; and the conclusion from our past experience is, that He who has been with us in six troubles, will not forsake us in the seventh. What we have known of our faithful God, proves that He will keep us to the end. Let us not, then, reason contrary to evidence. How can we ever be so ungenerous as to *doubt* our God? Lord, throw down the Jezebel of our unbelief, and let the dogs devour it.

*Thou crownest the year with thy goodness;
and thy paths drop fatness.
Psalm 65:11*

MANY are “the paths of the Lord” which “drop fatness,” but an especial one is the *path of prayer*. No believer, who is much in the closet, will have need to cry, “My leanness, my leanness; woe unto me.” Starving souls live at a distance from the mercy-seat, and become like the parched fields in times of drought. Prevalence with God in wrestling prayer is sure to make the believer strong—if not happy. The nearest place to the gate of heaven is the throne of the heavenly grace. Much alone, and you will have much assurance; little alone with Jesus, your religion will be shallow, polluted with many doubts and fears, and not sparkling with the joy of the Lord. Since the soul-enriching path of prayer is open to the very weakest saint; since no high attainments are required; since you are not bidden to come because you are an advanced saint, but freely invited if you be a saint at all; see to it, dear reader, that you are often in the way of private devotion. Be much on your knees, for so Elijah drew the rain upon famished Israel’s fields.

There is another especial path dropping with fatness to those who walk therein, it is the secret walk of *communion*. Oh! the delights of fellowship with Jesus! Earth hath no words which can set forth the holy calm of a soul leaning on Jesus’ bosom. Few Christians understand it, they live in the lowlands and seldom climb to the top of Nebo: they live in the outer court, they enter not the holy place, they take not up the privilege of priesthood. At a distance they see the sacrifice, but they sit not down with the priest to eat thereof, and to enjoy the fat of the burnt offering. But, reader, sit thou ever under the shadow of Jesus; come up to that palm tree, and take hold of the branches thereof; let thy beloved be unto thee as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, and thou shalt be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. O Jesus, visit us with Thy salvation!

*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual,
but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

1 Corinthians 3:1

ARE you mourning, believer, because you are so weak in the divine life: because your faith is so little, your love so feeble? Cheer up, for you have cause for gratitude. Remember *that in some things you are equal to the greatest and most full-grown Christian.* You are as much bought with blood as he is. You are as much an adopted child of God as any other believer. An infant is as truly a child of its parents as is the full-grown man. You are as completely justified, for your justification is not a thing of degrees: your little faith has made you clean every whit. You have as much right to the precious things of the covenant as the most advanced believers, for your right to covenant mercies lies not in your growth, but in the covenant itself; and your faith in Jesus is not the measure, but the token of your inheritance in Him. You are as rich as the richest, if not in enjoyment, yet in real possession. The smallest star that gleams is set in heaven; the faintest ray of light has affinity with the great orb of day. In the family register of glory the small and the great are written with the same pen. You are as dear to your Father's heart as the greatest in the family. Jesus is very tender over you. You are like the smoking flax; a rougher spirit would say, "put out that smoking flax, it fills the room with an offensive odour!" but the smoking flax *He* will not quench. You are like a bruised reed; and any less tender hand than that of the Chief Musician would tread upon you or throw you away, but He will never break the bruised reed. Instead of being downcast by reason of what you are, you should triumph in Christ. Am I but little in Israel? Yet in Christ I am made to sit in heavenly places. Am I poor in faith? Still in Jesus I am heir of all things. Though "less than nothing I can boast, and vanity confess." yet, if the root of the matter be in me I will rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the God of my salvation.

*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him
in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
Ephesians 4:15*

MANY Christians remain stunted and dwarfed in spiritual things, so as to present the same appearance year after year. No up-springing of advanced and refined feeling is manifest in them. They *exist* but do not “*grow up into Him in all things.*” But should we rest content with being in the “green blade,” when we might advance to “the ear,” and eventually ripen into the “full corn in the ear?” Should we be satisfied to believe in Christ, and to say, “I am safe,” without wishing to know in our own experience more of the fulness which is to be found in Him. It should not be so; we should, as good traders in heaven’s market, covet to be enriched in the knowledge of Jesus. It is all very well to keep other men’s vineyards, but we must not neglect our own spiritual growth and ripening. Why should it always be winter time in our hearts? We must have our seed time, it is true, but O for a spring time—yea, a summer season, which shall give promise of an early harvest. If we would ripen in grace, we must live near to Jesus—in His presence—ripened by the sunshine of His smiles. We must hold sweet communion with Him. We must leave the distant view of His face and come near, as John did, and pillow our head on His breast; then shall we find ourselves advancing in holiness, in love, in faith, in hope—yea, in every precious gift. As the sun rises first on mountain-tops and gilds them with his light, and presents one of the most charming sights to the eye of the traveller; so is it one of the most delightful contemplations in the world to mark the glow of the Spirit’s light on the head of some saint, who has risen up in spiritual stature, like Saul, above his fellows, till, like a mighty Alp, snow-capped, he reflects first among the chosen, the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and bears the sheen of His effulgence high aloft for all to see, and seeing it, to glorify His Father which is in heaven.

*For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge,
that if one died for all, then were all dead:*

2 Corinthians 5:14

HOW much owest thou unto my Lord? Has He ever done anything for thee? Has He forgiven thy sins? Has He covered thee with a robe of righteousness? Has He set thy feet upon a rock? Has He established thy goings? Has He prepared heaven for thee? Has He prepared thee for heaven? Has He written thy name in His book of life? Has He given thee countless blessings? Has He laid up for thee a store of mercies, which eye hath not seen nor ear heard? Then do something for Jesus worthy of His love. Give not a mere wordy offering to a dying Redeemer. How will you feel when your Master comes, if you have to confess that you *did* nothing for Him, but kept your love shut up, like a stagnant pool, neither flowing forth to His poor or to His work. Out on such love as that! What do men think of a love which never shows itself in action? Why, they say, "Open rebuke is better than secret love." Who will accept a love so weak that it does not actuate you to a single deed of self-denial, of generosity, of heroism, or zeal! Think how He has loved you, and given Himself for you! Do you know the power of that love? Then let it be like a rushing mighty wind to your soul to sweep out the clouds of your worldliness, and clear away the mists of sin. "For Christ's sake" be this the tongue of fire that shall sit upon you: "for Christ's sake" be this the divine rapture, the heavenly afflatus to bear you aloft from earth, the divine spirit that shall make you bold as lions and swift as eagles in your Lord's service. Love should give wings to the feet of service, and strength to the arms of labour. Fixed on God with a constancy that is not to be shaken, resolute to honour Him with a determination that is not to be turned aside, and pressing on with an ardour never to be wearied, let us manifest the constraints of love to Jesus. May the divine loadstone draw us heavenward towards itself.

*I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely:
for mine anger is turned away from him.*

Hosea 14:4

THIS sentence is a body of divinity in miniature. He who understands its meaning is a theologian, and he who can dive into its fulness is a true master in Israel. It is a condensation of the glorious message of salvation which was delivered to us in Christ Jesus our Redeemer. The sense hinges upon the word “freely.” This is the glorious, the suitable, the divine way by which love streams from heaven to earth, a spontaneous love flowing forth to those who neither deserved it, purchased it, nor sought after it. It is, indeed, the only way in which God can love such as we are. The text is a death-blow to all sorts of fitness: “I will love them *freely*.” Now, if there were any fitness necessary in us, then He would not love us freely, at least, this would be a mitigation and a drawback to the freeness of it. But it stands, “I will love you *freely*.” We complain, “Lord, my heart is so hard.” “I will love you freely.” “But I do not feel my need of Christ as I could wish.” “I will not love you because you feel your need; I will love you freely.” “But I do not feel that softening of spirit which I could desire.” Remember, the softening of spirit is not a condition, for there are no conditions; the covenant of grace has no conditionality whatever; so that we without any fitness may venture upon the promise of God which was made to us in Christ Jesus, when He said, “He that believeth on Him is not condemned.” It is blessed to know that the grace of God is free to us at all times, without preparation, without fitness, without money, and without price! “I will love them freely.” These words *invite backsliders to return*: indeed, the text was specially written for such—“I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely.” Backslider! surely the generosity of the promise will at once break your heart, and you will return, and seek your injured Father’s face.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

John 6:67

MANY have forsaken Christ, and have walked no more with Him; but *what reason have YOU to make a change?* Has there been any reason for it in the *past*? Has not Jesus proved Himself all-sufficient? He appeals to you this morning—"Have I been a wilderness unto you?" When your soul has simply trusted Jesus, have you ever been confounded? Have you not up till now found your Lord to be a compassionate and generous friend to you, and has not simple faith in Him given you all the peace your spirit could desire? Can you so much as dream of a better friend than He has been to you? Then change not the old and tried for new and false. As for *the present*, can that compel you to leave Christ? When we are hard beset with this world, or with the severer trials within the Church, we find it a most blessed thing to pillow our head upon the bosom of our Saviour. This is the joy we have today that we are saved in Him; and if this joy be satisfying, wherefore should we think of changing? Who barter gold for dross? We will not forswear the sun till we find a better light, nor leave our Lord until a brighter lover shall appear; and, since this can never be, we will hold Him with a grasp immortal, and bind His name as a seal upon our arm. As for *the future*, can you suggest anything which can arise that shall render it necessary for you to mutiny, or desert the old flag to serve under another captain? We think not. If life be long—He changes not. If we are poor, what better than to have Christ who can make us rich? When we are sick, what more do we want than Jesus to make our bed in our sickness? When we die, is it not written that "neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" We say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

*The trees of the LORD are full of sap;
the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted;
Psalm 104:16*

WITHOUT sap the tree cannot flourish or even exist. *Vitality* is essential to a Christian. There must be *life*—a vital principle infused into us by God the Holy Ghost, or we cannot be trees of the Lord. The mere name of being a Christian is but a dead thing, we must be filled with the spirit of divine life. This life is *mysterious*. We do not understand the circulation of the sap, by what force it rises, and by what power it descends again. So the life within us is a sacred mystery. Regeneration is wrought by the Holy Ghost entering into man and becoming man's life; and this divine life in a believer afterwards feeds upon the flesh and blood of Christ and is thus sustained by divine food, but whence it cometh and whither it goeth who shall explain to us? What a *secret* thing the sap is! The roots go searching through the soil with their little spongioles, but we cannot see them suck out the various gases, or transmute the mineral into the vegetable; this work is done down in the dark. Our root is Christ Jesus, and our life is hid in Him; this is the secret of the Lord. The radix of the Christian life is as secret as the life itself. How *permanently active* is the sap in the cedar! In the Christian the divine life is always full of energy—not always in fruit-bearing, but in inward operations. The believer's *graces*, are not every one of them in constant motion? but his life never ceases to palpitate within. He is not always working for God, but his heart is always living upon Him. As the sap *manifests itself in producing the foliage and fruit of the tree*, so with a truly healthy Christian, his grace is externally manifested in his walk and conversation. If you talk with him, he cannot help speaking about Jesus. If you notice his actions you will see that he has been with Jesus. He has so much sap within, that it must fill his conduct and conversation with life.

*For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us,
and shall be with us for ever.*

2 John 2

ONCE let the truth of God obtain an entrance into the human heart and subdue the whole man unto itself, no power human or infernal can dislodge it. We entertain it not as a guest but as the master of the house—this is a *Christian necessity*, he is no Christian who doth not thus believe. Those who feel the vital power of the gospel, and know the might of the Holy Ghost as He opens, applies, and seals the Lord's Word, would sooner be torn to pieces than be rent away from the gospel of their salvation. What a thousand mercies are wrapt up in the assurance that the truth will be with us forever; will be our living support, our dying comfort, our rising song, our eternal glory; this is *Christian privilege*, without it our faith were little worth. Some truths we outgrow and leave behind, for they are but rudiments and lessons for beginners, but we cannot thus deal with Divine truth, for though it is sweet food for babes, it is in the highest sense strong meat for men. The truth that we are sinners is painfully with us to humble and make us watchful; the more blessed truth that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus shall be saved, abides with us as our hope and joy. Experience, so far from loosening our hold of the doctrines of grace, has knit us to them more and more firmly; our grounds and motives for believing are now more strong, more numerous than ever, and we have reason to expect that it will be so till in death we clasp the Saviour in our arms.

Wherever this abiding love of truth can be discovered, we are bound to exercise our love. No narrow circle can contain our gracious sympathies, wide as the election of grace must be our communion of heart. Much of error may be mingled with truth received, let us war with the error but still love the brother for the measure of truth which we see in Him; above all let us love and spread the truth ourselves.

*Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little;
and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.*

*Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is
waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.*

Haggai 1:9

CHURLISH souls stint their contributions to the ministry and missionary operations, and call such saving good economy; little do they dream that they are thus impoverishing themselves. Their excuse is that they *must* care for their own families, and they forget that to neglect the house of God is the sure way to bring ruin upon their own houses. Our God has a method in providence by which He can succeed our endeavours beyond our expectation, or can defeat our plans to our confusion and dismay; by a turn of His hand He can steer our vessel in a profitable channel, or run it aground in poverty and bankruptcy. It is the teaching of Scripture that the Lord enriches the liberal and leaves the miserly to find out that withholding tendeth to poverty. In a very wide sphere of observation, I have noticed that the most generous Christians of my acquaintance have been always the most happy, and almost invariably the most prosperous. I have seen the liberal giver rise to wealth of which he never dreamed; and I have as often seen the mean, ungenerous churl descend to poverty by the very parsimony by which he thought to rise. Men trust good stewards with larger and larger sums, and so it frequently is with the Lord; He gives by cartloads to those who give by bushels. Where wealth is not bestowed the Lord makes the little much by the contentment which the sanctified heart feels in a portion of which the tithe has been dedicated to the Lord. Selfishness looks first at home, but godliness seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, yet in the long run selfishness is loss, and godliness is great gain. It needs faith to act towards our God with an open hand, but surely He deserves it of us; and all that we can do is a very poor acknowledgment of our amazing indebtedness to His goodness.

*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him,
we shall also live with him:*

2 Timothy 2:11

PAUL has four of these “*faithful sayings*.” The first occurs in 1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The next is in 1 Timothy 4:6, “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance.” The third is in 2 Timothy 2:12, “It is a faithful saying—If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him”; and the fourth is in Titus 3:3, “This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.” We may trace a connection between these faithful sayings. The first one lays the foundation of our eternal salvation in the free grace of God, as shown to us in the mission of the great Redeemer. The next affirms the double blessedness which we obtain through this salvation—the blessings of the upper and nether springs—of time and of eternity. The third shows one of the duties to which the chosen people are called; we are ordained to suffer for Christ with the promise that “if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” The last sets forth the active form of Christian service, bidding us diligently to maintain good works. Thus we have the root of salvation in free grace; next, the privileges of that salvation in the life which now is, and in that which is to come; and we have also the two great branches of suffering with Christ and serving with Christ, loaded with the fruits of the Spirit. Treasure up these faithful sayings. Let them be the guides of our life, our comfort, and our instruction. The apostle of the Gentiles proved them to be faithful, they are faithful still, not one word shall fall to the ground; they are worthy of all acceptance, let us accept them now, and prove their faithfulness. Let these four faithful sayings be written on the four corners of My house.

*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own:
but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you
out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

John 15:19

HERE is distinguishing grace and discriminating regard; for some are made the special objects of divine affection. Do not be afraid to dwell upon this high doctrine of election. When your mind is most heavy and depressed, you will find it to be a bottle of richest cordial. Those who doubt the doctrines of grace, or who cast them into the shade, miss the richest clusters of Eshcol; they lose the wines on the lees well refined, the fat things full of marrow. There is no balm in Gilead comparable to it. If the honey in Jonathan's wood when but touched enlightened *the eyes*, this is honey which will enlighten *your heart* to love and learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Eat, and fear not a surfeit; live upon this choice dainty, and fear not that it will be too delicate a diet. Meat from the King's table will hurt none of His courtiers. Desire to have your mind enlarged, that you may comprehend more and more the eternal, everlasting, discriminating love of God. When you have mounted as high as election, tarry on its sister mount, the covenant of grace. Covenant engagements are the munitions of stupendous rock behind which we lie entrenched; covenant engagements with the surety, Christ Jesus, are the quiet resting-places of trembling spirits.

“His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the raging flood;
When every earthly prop gives way,
This still is all my strength and stay.”

If Jesus undertook to bring me to glory, and if the Father promised that He would give me to the Son to be a part of the infinite reward of the travail of His soul; then, my soul, till God Himself shall be unfaithful, till Jesus shall cease to be the truth, thou art safe. When David danced before the ark, he told Michal that election made him do so. Come, my soul, exult before the God of grace and leap for joy of heart.

*After this manner therefore pray ye:
Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Matthew 6:9*

THIS prayer begins where all true prayer must commence, with the spirit of *adoption*, “Our Father.” There is no acceptable prayer until we can say, “I will arise, and go unto my Father.” This child-like spirit soon perceives the grandeur of the Father “in heaven,” and ascends to *devout adoration*, “Hallowed be Thy name.” The child lisping, “Abba, Father,” grows into the cherub crying, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” There is but a step from rapturous worship to the *glowing missionary spirit*, which is a sure outgrowth of filial love and reverent adoration—“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Next follows the heartfelt *expression of dependence* upon God—“Give us this day our daily bread.” Being further illuminated by the Spirit, he discovers that he is not only dependent, but sinful, hence he *entreats for mercy*, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors:” and being pardoned, having the righteousness of Christ imputed, and knowing his acceptance with God, he humbly *supplicates for holy perseverance*, “Lead us not into temptation.” The man who is really forgiven, is anxious not to offend again; the possession of justification leads to an anxious desire for sanctification. “Forgive us our debts,” that is justification; “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” that is sanctification in its negative and positive forms. As the result of all this, there follows a *triumphant ascription of praise*, “Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.” We rejoice that our King reigns in providence and shall reign in grace, from the river even to the ends of the earth, and of His dominion there shall be no end. Thus from a sense of adoption, up to fellowship with our reigning Lord, this short model of prayer conducts the soul. Lord, teach us thus to pray.

*I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart;
I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.
Psalm 9:1*

PRAISE should always follow answered prayer; as the mist of earth's gratitude rises when the sun of heaven's love warms the ground. Hath the Lord been gracious to thee, and inclined His ear to the voice of thy supplication? Then praise Him as long as thou livest. Let the ripe fruit drop upon the fertile soil from which it drew its life. Deny not a song to Him who hath answered thy prayer and given thee the desire of thy heart. To be silent over God's mercies is to incur the guilt of ingratitude; it is to act as basely as the nine lepers, who after they had been cured of their leprosy, returned not to give thanks unto the healing Lord. To forget to praise God is to refuse to benefit ourselves; for praise, like prayer, is one great means of promoting the growth of the spiritual life. It helps to remove our burdens, to excite our hope, to increase our faith. It is a healthful and invigorating exercise which quickens the pulse of the believer, and nerves him for fresh enterprises in his Master's service. To bless God for mercies received is also the way to benefit our fellowmen; "the humble shall hear thereof and be glad." Others who have been in like circumstances shall take comfort if we can say, "Oh! magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together; this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Weak hearts will be strengthened, and drooping saints will be revived as they listen to our "songs of deliverance." Their doubts and fears will be rebuked, as we teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They too shall "sing in the ways of the Lord," when they hear us magnify His holy name. Praise is the most heavenly of Christian duties. The angels pray not, but they cease not to praise both day and night; and the redeemed, clothed in white robes, with palm-branches in their hands, are never weary of singing the new song, "Worthy is the Lamb."

*Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.
Psalm 51:10*

A backslider, if there be a spark of life left in him will groan after restoration. In this renewal the same exercise of grace is required as at our conversion. We needed repentance then; we certainly need it now. We wanted faith that we might come to Christ at first; only the like grace can bring us to Jesus now. We wanted a word from the Most High, a word from the lip of the loving One, to end our fears then; we shall soon discover, when under a sense of present sin, that we need it now. No man can be renewed without as real and true a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's energy as he felt at first, because the work is as great, and flesh and blood are as much in the way now as ever they were. Let thy personal weakness, O Christian, be an argument to make thee pray earnestly to thy God for help. Remember, David when he felt himself to be powerless, did not fold his arms or close his lips, but he hastened to the mercy-seat with "renew a right spirit within me." Let not the doctrine that you, unaided, can do nothing, make you sleep; but let it be a goad in your side to drive you with an awful earnestness to Israel's strong Helper. O that you may have grace to plead with God, as though you pleaded for your very life—"Lord, renew a right spirit within me." He who *sincerely* prays to God to do this, will prove his honesty by using the means through which God works. Be much in prayer; live much upon the Word of God; kill the lusts which have driven your Lord from you; be careful to watch over the future uprisings of sin. The Lord has His own appointed ways; sit by the wayside and you will be ready when He passes by. Continue in all those blessed ordinances which will foster and nourish your dying graces; and, knowing that all the power must proceed from Him, cease not to cry, "Renew a right spirit within me."

*And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier,
and to the church in thy house:*

Philemon 2

IS there a Church in this house? Are parents, children, friends, servants, all members of it? or are some still unconverted? Let us pause here and let the question go round—*Am I a member of the Church in this house?* How would father's heart leap for joy, and mother's eyes fill with holy tears if from the eldest to the youngest all were saved! Let us pray for this great mercy until the Lord shall grant it to us. Probably it had been the dearest object of Philemon's desires to have all his household saved; but it was not at first granted him in its fulness. He had a wicked servant, Onesimus, who, having wronged him, ran away from his service. His master's prayers followed him, and at last, as God would have it, Onesimus was led to hear Paul preach; his heart was touched, and he returned to Philemon, not only to be a faithful servant, but a brother beloved, adding another member to the Church in Philemon's house. Is there an unconverted servant or child absent this morning? Make special supplication that such may, on their return to their home, gladden all hearts with good news of what grace has done! Is there one present? Let him partake in the same earnest entreaty.

If there be such a Church in our house, let us order it well, and let all act as in the sight of God. Let us move in the common affairs of life with studied holiness, diligence, kindness, and integrity. More is expected of a Church than of an ordinary household; family worship must, in such a case, be more devout and hearty; internal love must be more warm and unbroken, and external conduct must be more sanctified and Christlike. We need not fear that the smallness of our number will put us out of the list of Churches, for the Holy Spirit has here enrolled a family-church in the inspired book of remembrance. As a Church let us now draw nigh to the great head of the one Church universal, and let us beseech Him to give us grace to shine before men to the glory of His name.

*For I am the LORD, I change not;
therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

Malachi 3:6

IT is well for us that, amidst all the variableness of life, there is One whom change cannot affect; One whose heart can never alter, and on whose brow mutability can make no furrows. All things else have changed—all things are changing. The sun itself grows dim with age; the world is waxing old; the folding up of the worn-out vesture has commenced; the heavens and earth must soon pass away; they shall perish, they shall wax old as doth a garment; but there is One who only hath immortality, of whose years there is no end, and in whose person there is no change. The delight which the mariner feels, when, after having been tossed about for many a day, he steps again upon the solid shore, is the satisfaction of a Christian when, amidst all the changes of this troublous life, he rests the foot of his faith upon this truth—*“I am the Lord, I change not.”*

The stability which the anchor gives the ship when it has at last obtained a hold-fast, is like that which the Christian’s hope affords him when it fixes itself upon this glorious truth. With God “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” What ever His attributes were of old, they are now; His power, His wisdom, His justice, His truth, are alike unchanged. He has ever been the refuge of His people, their stronghold in the day of trouble, and He is their sure Helper still. He is unchanged in His *love*. He has loved His people with “an everlasting love”; He loves them now as much as ever He did, and when all earthly things shall have melted in the last conflagration, His love will still wear the dew of its youth. Precious is the assurance that He changes not! The wheel of providence revolves, but its axle is eternal love.

“Death and change are busy ever,
Man decays, and ages move;
But His mercy waneth never;
God is wisdom, God is love.”

*And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,
Acts 9:11*

PRAYERS are instantly noticed in heaven. The moment Saul began to pray the Lord heard him. Here is comfort for the distressed but praying soul. Oftentimes a poor broken-hearted one bends his knee, but can only utter his wailing in the language of sighs and tears; yet that groan has made all the harps of heaven thrill with music; that tear has been caught by God and treasured in the lachrymatory of heaven. "Thou puttest my tears into thy bottle," implies that they are caught as they flow. The suppliant, whose fears prevent his words, will be well understood by the Most High. He may only look up with misty eye; but "prayer is the falling of a tear." Tears are the diamonds of heaven; sighs are a part of the music of Jehovah's court, and are numbered with "the sublimest strains that reach the majesty on high." Think not that your prayer, however weak or trembling, will be unregarded. Jacob's ladder is lofty, but our prayers shall lean upon the Angel of the covenant and so climb its starry rounds. Our God not only *hears* prayer but also *loves* to hear it. "He forgetteth not the cry of the humble." True, He regards not high looks and lofty words; He cares not for the pomp and pageantry of kings; He listens not to the swell of martial music; He regards not the triumph and pride of man; but wherever there is a heart big with sorrow, or a lip quivering with agony, or a deep groan, or a penitential sigh, the heart of Jehovah is open; He marks it down in the registry of His memory; He puts our prayers, like rose leaves, between the pages of His book of remembrance, and when the volume is opened at last, there shall be a precious fragrance springing up therefrom.

"Faith asks no signal from the skies,
To show that prayers accepted rise,
Our Priest is in His holy place,
And answers from the throne of grace."

*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee:
for my strength is made perfect in weakness.
Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities,
that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
2 Corinthians 12:9*

A primary qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God's work well and triumphantly, is a sense of our own weakness. When God's warrior marches forth to battle, strong in his own might, when he boasts, "I know that I shall conquer, my own right arm and my conquering sword shall get unto me the victory," defeat is not far distant. God will not go forth with that man who marches in his own strength. He who reckoneth on victory thus has reckoned wrongly, for "it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." They who go forth to fight, boasting of their prowess, shall return with their gay banners trailed in the dust, and their armour stained with disgrace. Those who serve God must serve Him in His own way, and in His strength, or He will never accept their service. That which man doth, unaided by divine strength, God can never own. The mere fruits of the earth He casteth away; He will only reap that corn, the seed of which was sown from heaven, watered by grace, and ripened by the sun of divine love. God will empty out all that thou hast before He will put His own into thee; He will first clean out thy granaries before He will fill them with the finest of the wheat. The river of God is full of water; but not one drop of it flows from earthly springs. God will have no strength used in His battles but the strength which He Himself imparts. Are you mourning over your own weakness? Take courage, for there must be a consciousness of weakness before the Lord will give thee victory. Your emptiness is but the preparation for your being filled, and your casting down is but the making ready for your lifting up.

"When I am weak then am I strong,
Grace is my shield and Christ my song."

*No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;
and every tongue that shall rise 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.*

Isaiah 54:17

THIS day is notable in English history for two great deliverances wrought by God for us. On this day the plot of the Papists to destroy our Houses of Parliament was discovered, 1605.

“While for our princes they prepare
In caverns deep a burning snare,
He shot from heaven a piercing ray,
And the dark treachery brought to day.”

And secondly—today is the anniversary of the landing of King William III, at Torbay, by which the hope of Popish ascendancy was quashed, and religious liberty was secured, 1688.

This day ought to be celebrated, not by the saturnalia of striplings, but by the songs of saints. Our Puritan forefathers most devoutly made it a special time of thanksgiving. There is extant a record of the annual sermons preached by Matthew Henry on this day. Our Protestant feeling, and our love of liberty, should make us regard its anniversary with holy gratitude. Let our hearts and lips exclaim, “We have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us the wondrous things which Thou didst in their day, and in the old time before them.” Thou hast made this nation the home of the gospel; and when the foe has risen against her, Thou hast shielded her. Help us to offer repeated songs for repeated deliverances. Grant us more and more a hatred of Antichrist, and hasten on the day of her entire extinction. Till then and ever, we believe the promise, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.” Should it not be laid upon the heart of every lover of the gospel of Jesus on this day to plead for the overturning of false doctrines and the extension of divine truth? Would it not be well to search our own hearts, and turn out any of the Popish lumber of self-righteousness which may lie concealed therein?

*For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty,
and floods upon the dry ground:
I will pour my spirit upon thy seed,
and my blessing upon thine offspring:
Isaiah 44:3*

WHEN a believer has fallen into a low, sad state of feeling, he often tries to lift himself out of it by chastening himself with dark and doleful fears. Such is not the way to rise from the dust, but to continue in it. As well chain the eagle's wing to make it mount, as doubt in order to increase our grace. It is not the law, but the gospel which saves the seeking soul at first; and it is not a legal bondage, but gospel liberty which can restore the fainting believer afterwards. Slavish fear brings not back the backslider to God, but the sweet wooings of love allure him to Jesus' bosom. Are you this morning thirsting for the living God, and unhappy because you cannot find him to the delight of your heart? Have you lost the joy of religion, and is this your prayer, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation"? Are you conscious also that you are barren, like the dry ground; that you are not bringing forth the fruit unto God which He has a right to expect of you; that you are not so useful in the Church, or in the world, as your heart desires to be? Then here is exactly the promise which you need, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty." You shall receive the grace you so much require, and you shall have it to the utmost reach of your needs. Water refreshes the thirsty: you shall be refreshed; your desires shall be gratified. Water quickens sleeping vegetable life: your life shall be quickened by fresh grace. Water swells the buds and makes the fruits ripen; you shall have fructifying grace: you shall be made fruitful in the ways of God. Whatever good quality there is in divine grace, you shall enjoy it to the full. All the riches of divine grace you shall receive in plenty; you shall be as it were drenched with it: and as sometimes the meadows become flooded by the bursting rivers, and the fields are turned into pools, so shall you be—the thirsty land shall be springs of water.

*Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;
thy walls are continually before me.*

Isaiah 49:16

NO doubt a part of the wonder which is concentrated in the word “*Behold,*” is excited by the unbelieving lamentation of the preceding sentence. Zion said, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.” How amazed the divine mind seems to be at this wicked unbelief! What can be more astounding than the unfounded doubts and fears of God’s favoured people? The Lord’s loving word of rebuke should make us blush; He cries, “How can I have forgotten thee, when I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands? How darest thou doubt my constant remembrance, when the memorial is set upon my very flesh?” O unbelief, how strange a marvel thou art! We know not which most to wonder at, the faithfulness of God or the unbelief of His people. He keeps His promise a thousand times, and yet the next trial makes us doubt Him. He never faileth; He is never a dry well; He is never as a setting sun, a passing meteor, or a melting vapour; and yet we are as continually vexed with anxieties, molested with suspicions, and disturbed with fears, as if our God were the mirage of the desert. “*Behold,*” is a word intended to excite admiration. Here, indeed, we have a theme for marvelling. Heaven and earth may well be astonished that rebels should obtain so great a nearness to the heart of infinite love as to be written upon the palms of His hands. “I have graven *thee.*” It does not say, “Thy name.” The name is there, but that is not all: “I have graven *thee.*” See the fulness of this! I have graven thy person, thine image, thy case, thy circumstances, thy sins, thy temptations, thy weaknesses, thy wants, thy works; I have graven *thee*, everything about thee, all that concerns thee; I have put thee altogether there. Wilt thou ever say again that thy God hath forsaken thee when He has graven *thee* upon His own palms?

*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk ye in him:
Colossians 2:6*

THE life of faith is represented as *receiving*—an act which implies the very opposite of anything like merit. It is simply the acceptance of a gift. As the earth drinks in the rain, as the sea receives the streams, as night accepts light from the stars, so we, giving nothing, partake freely of the grace of God. The saints are not, by nature, wells, or streams, they are but cisterns into which the living water flows; they are empty vessels into which God pours His salvation. The idea of receiving implies *a sense of realization*, making the matter *a reality*. One cannot very well receive a shadow; we receive that which is substantial: so is it in the life of faith, Christ becomes real to us. While we are without faith, Jesus is a mere name to us—a person who lived a long while ago, so long ago that His life is only a history to us now! By an act of faith Jesus becomes a real person in the consciousness of our heart. But receiving also means *grasping* or *getting possession of*. The thing which I receive becomes my own: I appropriate to myself that which is given. When I receive Jesus, He becomes my Saviour, so mine that neither life nor death shall be able to rob me of Him. All this is to receive Christ—to take Him as God's free gift; to realize Him in my heart, and to appropriate Him as mine.

Salvation may be described as the blind receiving sight, the deaf receiving hearing, the dead receiving life; but we have not only received these blessings, we have received CHRIST JESUS Himself. It is true that He gave us life from the dead. He gave us pardon of sin; He gave us imputed righteousness. These are all precious things, but we are not content with them; we have received *Christ Himself*. The Son of God has been poured into us, and we have received Him, and appropriated Him. What a heartfelt Jesus must be, for heaven itself cannot contain Him!

*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk ye in him:
Colossians 2:6*

IF we have received Christ Himself in our inmost hearts, our new life will manifest its intimate acquaintance with Him by *a walk of faith in Him*. Walking implies *action*. Our religion is not to be confined to our closet; we must carry out into practical effect that which we believe. If a man walks in Christ, then he so acts as Christ would act; for Christ being in him, his hope, his love, his joy, his life, he is the reflex of the image of Jesus; and men say of that man, "He is like his Master; he lives like Jesus Christ." Walking signifies *progress*. "So walk ye in Him"; proceed from grace to grace, run forward until you reach the uttermost degree of knowledge that a man can attain concerning our Beloved. Walking implies *continuance*. There must be a perpetual abiding in Christ. How many Christians think that in the morning and evening they ought to come into the company of Jesus, and may then give their hearts to the world all the day: but this is poor living; we should always be with Him, treading in His steps and doing His will. Walking also implies *habit*. When we speak of a man's walk and conversation, we mean his habits, the constant tenor of his life. Now, if we sometimes enjoy Christ, and then forget Him; sometimes call Him ours, and anon lose our hold, that is not a habit; we do not *walk* in Him. We must keep to Him, cling to Him, never let Him go, but live and have our being in Him. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him"; persevere in the same way in which ye have begun, and, as at the first Christ Jesus was the trust of your faith, the source of your life, the principle of your action, and the joy of your spirit, so let Him be the same till life's end; the same when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and enter into the joy and the rest which remain for the people of God. O Holy Spirit, enable us to obey this heavenly precept.

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

Deuteronomy 33:27

THE word refuge may be translated “mansion,” or “abiding-place,” which gives the thought that *God is our abode, our home*. There is a fulness and sweetness in the metaphor, for dear to our hearts is our home, although it be the humblest cottage, or the scantiest garret; and dearer far is our blessed God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. It is at home that we *feel safe*: we shut the world out and dwell in quiet security. So when we are with our God we “fear no evil.” He is our shelter and retreat, our abiding refuge. At home, *we take our rest*; it is there we find repose after the fatigue and toil of the day. And so our hearts find rest in God, when, wearied with life’s conflict, we turn to Him, and our soul dwells at ease. At home, also, *we let our hearts loose*; we are not afraid of being misunderstood, nor of our words being misconstrued. So when we are with God we can commune freely with Him, laying open all our hidden desires; for if the “secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,” the secrets of them that fear Him ought to be, and must be, with their Lord. Home, too, is the place of our *truest and purest happiness*: and it is in God that our hearts find their deepest delight. We have joy in Him which far surpasses all other joy. *It is also for home that we work and labour*. The thought of it gives strength to bear the daily burden, and quickens the fingers to perform the task; and in this sense we may also say that God is our home. Love to Him strengthens us. We think of Him in the person of His dear Son; and a glimpse of the suffering face of the Redeemer constrains us to labour in His cause. We feel that we must work, for we have brethren yet to be saved, and we have our Father’s heart to make glad by bringing home His wandering sons; we would fill with holy mirth the sacred family among whom we dwell. Happy are those who have thus the God of Jacob for their refuge!

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

Deuteronomy 33:27

GOD—THE eternal God—is Himself *our support* at all times, and especially when we are sinking in deep trouble. There are seasons when the Christian *sinks very low in humiliation*. Under a deep sense of his great sinfulness, he is humbled before God till he scarcely knows how to pray, because he appears, in his own sight, so worthless. Well, child of God, remember that when thou art at thy worst and lowest, yet “underneath” thee “are everlasting arms.” Sin may drag thee ever so low, but Christ’s great atonement is still under all. You may have descended into the deeps, but you cannot have fallen so low as “the uttermost”; and to the uttermost He saves. Again, the Christian sometimes sinks very deeply in *sore trial from without*. Every earthly prop is cut away. What then? Still underneath him are “the everlasting arms.” He cannot fall so deep in distress and affliction but what the covenant grace of an ever-faithful God will still encircle him. The Christian may be sinking under *trouble from within* through fierce conflict, but even then he cannot be brought so low as to be beyond the reach of the “everlasting arms”—they are underneath him; and, while thus sustained, all Satan’s efforts to harm him avail nothing.

This assurance of support is a comfort to any *weary but earnest worker* in the service of God. It implies a promise of strength for each day, grace for each need, and power for each duty. And, further, *when death comes*, the promise shall still hold good. When we stand in the midst of Jordan, we shall be able to say with David, “I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.” We shall descend into the grave, but we shall go no lower, for the eternal arms prevent our further fall. All through life, and at its close, we shall be upheld by the “everlasting arms”—arms that neither flag nor lose their strength, for “the everlasting God fainteth not, neither is weary.”

*That the trial of your faith,
being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,
though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and
honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:
1 Peter 1:7*

FAITH untried may be true faith, but it is sure to be little faith, and it is likely to remain dwarfish so long as it is without trials. Faith never prospers so well as when all things are against her: tempests are her trainers, and lightnings are her illuminators. When a calm reigns on the sea, spread the sails as you will, the ship moves not to its harbour; for on a slumbering ocean the keel sleeps too. Let the winds rush howling forth, and let the waters lift up themselves, then, though the vessel may rock, and her deck may be washed with waves, and her mast may creak under the pressure of the full and swelling sail, it is then that she makes headway towards her desired haven. No flowers wear so lovely a blue as those which grow at the foot of the frozen glacier; no stars gleam so brightly as those which glisten in the polar sky; no water tastes so sweet as that which springs amid the desert sand; and no faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity. Tried faith brings experience. You could not have believed your own weakness had you not been compelled to pass through the rivers; and you would never have known God's strength had you not been supported amid the water-floods. Faith increases in solidity, assurance, and intensity, the more it is exercised with tribulation. Faith is precious, and its trial is precious too.

Let not this, however, discourage those who are young in faith. You will have trials enough without seeking them: the full portion will be measured out to you in due season. Meanwhile, if you cannot yet claim the result of long experience, thank God for what grace you have; praise Him for that degree of holy confidence whereunto you have attained: walk according to that rule, and you shall yet have more and more of the blessing of God, till your faith shall remove mountains and conquer impossibilities.

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot
bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine;
no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
John 15:4*

HOW did you begin to bear fruit? It was when you came to Jesus and cast yourselves on His great atonement, and rested on His finished righteousness. Ah! what fruit you had then! Do you remember those early days? Then indeed the vine flourished, the tender grape appeared, the pomegranates budded forth, and the beds of spices gave forth their smell. Have you declined since then? If you have, we charge you to remember that time of love, and repent, and do thy first works. *Be most in those engagements which you have experimentally proved to draw you nearest to Christ*, because it is from Him that all your fruits proceed. Any holy exercise which will bring you to Him will help you to bear fruit. The sun is, no doubt, a great worker in fruit-creating among the trees of the orchard: and Jesus is still more so among the trees of His garden of grace. When have you been the most fruitless? Has not it been when you have lived farthest from the Lord Jesus Christ, when you have slackened in prayer, when you have departed from the simplicity of your faith, when your graces have engrossed your attention instead of your Lord, when you have said, “My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved”; and have forgotten where your strength dwells—has not it been then that your fruit has ceased? Some of us have been taught that we have nothing out of Christ, by terrible abasements of heart before the Lord; and when we have seen the utter barrenness and death of all creature power, we have cried in anguish, “From Him all my fruit must be found, for no fruit can ever come from me.” We are taught, by past experience, that the more simply we depend upon the grace of God in Christ, and wait upon the Holy Spirit, the more we shall bring forth fruit unto God. Oh! to trust Jesus for fruit as well as for life.

*And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops;
and them that worship and that swear by the LORD,
and that swear by Malcham;
Zephaniah 1:5*

SUCH persons thought themselves safe because they were with both parties: they went with the followers of Jehovah, and bowed at the same time to Malcham. But duplicity is abominable with God, and hypocrisy His soul hateth. The idolater who distinctly gives himself to his false god, has one sin less than he who brings his polluted and detestable sacrifice unto the temple of the Lord, while his heart is with the world and the sins thereof. To hold with the hare and run with the hounds, is a dastard's policy. In the common matters of daily life, a double-minded man is despised, but in religion he is loathsome to the last degree. The penalty pronounced in the verse before us is terrible, but it is well deserved; for how should divine justice spare the sinner, who knows the right, approves it, and professes to follow it, and all the while loves the evil, and gives it dominion in his heart?

My soul, search thyself this morning, and see whether thou art guilty of double-dealing. Thou professest to be a follower of Jesus—dost thou truly love Him? Is thy heart right with God? Art thou of the family of old Father Honest, or art thou a relative of Mr. By-ends? A name to live is of little value if I be indeed dead in trespasses and sins. To have one foot on the land of truth, and another on the sea of falsehood, will involve a terrible fall and a total ruin. Christ will be all or nothing. God fills the whole universe, and hence there is no room for another god; if, then, He reigns in my heart, there will be no space for another reigning power. Do I rest alone on Jesus crucified, and live alone for Him? Is it my desire to do so? Is my heart set upon so doing? If so, blessed be the mighty grace which has led me to salvation; and if not so, O Lord, pardon my sad offence, and unite my heart to fear Thy name.

*For the LORD'S portion is his people;
Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.
Deuteronomy 32:9*

HOW are they His? By His own sovereign *choice*. He chose them, and set His love upon them. This He did altogether apart from any goodness in them at the time, or any goodness which He foresaw in them. He had mercy on whom He would have mercy, and ordained a chosen company unto eternal life; thus, therefore, are they His by His unconstrained election.

They are not only His by choice, but by *purchase*. He has bought and paid for them to the utmost farthing, hence about His title there can be no dispute. Not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord's portion has been fully redeemed. There is no mortgage on His estate; no suits can be raised by opposing claimants, the price was paid in open court, and the Church is the Lord's freehold forever. See the blood-mark upon all the chosen, invisible to human eye, but known to Christ, for "the Lord knoweth them that are His"; He forgetteth none of those whom He has redeemed from among men; He counts the sheep for whom He laid down His life, and remembers well the Church for which He gave Himself.

They are also His by *conquest*. What a battle He had in us before we would be won! How long He laid siege to our hearts! How often He sent us terms of capitulation! but we barred our gates, and fenced our walls against Him. Do we not remember that glorious hour when He carried our hearts by storm? When He placed His cross against the wall, and scaled our ramparts, planting on our strongholds the blood-red flag of His omnipotent mercy? Yes, we are, indeed, the conquered captives of His omnipotent love. Thus chosen, purchased, and subdued, the rights of our divine possessor are inalienable: we rejoice that we never can be our own; and we desire, day by day, to do *His* will, and to show forth *His* glory.

*The LORD is my portion, saith my soul;
therefore will I hope in him.
Lamentations 3:24*

IT is not “The Lord is *partly* my portion,” nor “The Lord is *in* my portion”; but He Himself makes up the sum total of my soul’s inheritance. Within the circumference of that circle lies all that we possess or desire. The *Lord* is my portion. Not His grace merely, nor His love, nor His covenant, but Jehovah Himself. He has chosen us for His portion, and we have chosen Him for ours. It is true that the Lord must first choose our inheritance for us, or else we shall never choose it for ourselves; but if we are really called according to the purpose of electing love, we can sing—

“Lov’d of my God for Him again
With love intense I burn;
Chosen of Him ere time began,
I choose Him in return.”

The Lord is our *all-sufficient* portion. God fills Himself; and if God is all-sufficient in Himself, He must be all-sufficient for us. It is not easy to satisfy man’s desires. When he dreams that he is satisfied, anon he wakes to the perception that there is somewhat yet beyond, and straightway the horse-leech in his heart cries, “Give, give.” But all that we can wish for is to be found in our divine portion, so that we ask, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.” Well may we “delight ourselves in the Lord” who makes us to drink of the river of His pleasures. Our faith stretches her wings and mounts like an eagle into the heaven of divine love as to her proper dwelling-place. “The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage.” Let us rejoice in the Lord always; let us show to the world that we are a happy and a blessed people, and thus induce them to exclaim, “We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things:
to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*

Romans 11:36

“**T**O whom be glory for ever.” This should be *the single* desire of the Christian. All other wishes must be subservient and tributary to this one. The Christian may wish for prosperity in his business, but only so far as it may help him to promote this—“To Him be glory for ever.” He may desire to attain more gifts and more graces, but it should only be that “To Him may be glory for ever.” You are not acting as you ought to do when you are moved by any other motive than a single eye to your Lord’s glory. As a Christian, you are “of God, and through God,” then live “to God.” Let nothing ever set your heart beating so mightily as love to Him. Let this ambition fire your soul; be this the foundation of every enterprise upon which you enter, and this your sustaining motive whenever your zeal would grow chill; make God your *only* object. Depend upon it, where self begins sorrow begins; but if God be my supreme delight and only object,

“To me ‘tis equal whether love ordain
My life or death—appoint me ease or pain.”

Let your desire for God’s glory be a *growing* desire. You blessed Him in your youth, do not be content with such praises as you gave Him then. Has God prospered you in business? Give Him more as He has given you more. Has God given you experience? Praise Him by stronger faith than you exercised at first. Does your knowledge grow? Then sing more sweetly. Do you enjoy happier times than you once had? Have you been restored from sickness, and has your sorrow been turned into peace and joy? Then give Him more music; put more coals and more sweet frankincense into the censer of your praise. Practically in your life give Him honour, putting the “Amen” to this doxology to your great and gracious Lord, by your own individual service and increasing holiness.

*A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse;
a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.
Song of Solomon 4:12*

IN this metaphor, which has reference to the inner life of a believer, we have very plainly the idea of *secrecy*. It is a spring *shut up*: just as there were springs in the East, over which an edifice was built, so that none could reach them save those who knew the secret entrance; so is the heart of a believer when it is renewed by grace: there is a mysterious life within which no human skill can touch. It is a secret which no other man knoweth; nay, which the very man who is the possessor of it cannot tell to his neighbour. The text includes not only *secrecy*, but *separation*. It is not the common spring, of which every passer-by may drink, it is one kept and preserved from all others; it is a fountain bearing a particular mark—a king's royal seal, so that all can perceive that it is not a common fountain, but a fountain owned by a proprietor, and placed specially by itself alone. So is it with the spiritual life. The chosen of God were separated in the eternal decree; they were separated by God in the day of redemption; and they are separated by the possession of a life which others have not; and it is impossible for them to feel at home with the world, or to delight in its pleasures. There is also the idea of *sacredness*. The spring shut up is preserved for the use of some special person: and such is the Christian's heart. It is a spring kept for Jesus. Every Christian should feel that he has God's seal upon him—and he should be able to say with Paul, "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Another idea is prominent—it is that of *security*. Oh! how sure and safe is the inner life of the believer! If all the powers of earth and hell could combine against it, that immortal principle must still exist, for He who gave it pledged His life for its preservation. And who "is He that shall harm you," when God is your protector?

But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

Titus 3:9

OUR days are few, and are far better spent in doing good, than in disputing over matters which are, at best, of minor importance. The old schoolmen did a world of mischief by their incessant discussion of subjects of no practical importance; and our Churches suffer much from petty wars over abstruse points and unimportant questions. After everything has been said that can be said, neither party is any the wiser, and therefore the discussion no more promotes knowledge than love, and it is foolish to sow in so barren a field. Questions upon points wherein Scripture is silent; upon mysteries which belong to God alone; upon prophecies of doubtful interpretation; and upon mere modes of observing human ceremonials, are all foolish, and wise men avoid them. Our business is neither to ask nor answer foolish questions, but to avoid them altogether; and if we observe the apostle's precept (Titus 3:8) to be careful to maintain good works, we shall find ourselves far too much occupied with profitable business to take much interest in unworthy, contentious, and needless strivings.

There are, however, some questions which are the reverse of foolish, which we must not avoid, but fairly and honestly meet, such as these: Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I renewed in the spirit of my mind? Am I walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit? Am I growing in grace? Does my conversation adorn the doctrine of God my Saviour? Am I looking for the coming of the Lord, and watching as a servant should do who expects his master? What more can I do for Jesus? Such enquiries as these urgently demand our attention; and if we have been at all given to cavilling, let us now turn our critical abilities to a service so much more profitable. Let us be peace-makers, and endeavour to lead others both by our precept and example, to "avoid foolish questions."

*O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul;
thou hast redeemed my life.*

Lamentations 3:58

OBSERVE how *positively* the prophet speaks. He doth not say, "I hope, I trust, I sometimes think, that God hath pleaded the causes of my soul"; but he speaks of it as a matter of fact not to be disputed. "Thou *hast* pleaded the causes of my soul." Let us, by the aid of the gracious Comforter, shake off those doubts and fears which so much mar our peace and comfort. Be this our prayer, that we may have done with the harsh croaking voice of surmise and suspicion, and may be able to speak with the clear, melodious voice of full assurance. Notice how *gratefully* the prophet speaks, ascribing all the glory to God alone! You perceive there is not a word concerning himself or his own pleadings. He doth not ascribe his deliverance in any measure to any man, much less to his own merit; but it is "*thou*"—"O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; *Thou* hast redeemed my life." A grateful spirit should ever be cultivated by the Christian; and especially after deliverances we should prepare a song for our God. Earth should be a temple filled with the songs of grateful saints, and every day should be a censor smoking with the sweet incense of thanksgiving. How *joyful* Jeremiah seems to be while he records the Lord's mercy. How triumphantly he lifts up the strain! He has been in the low dungeon, and is even now no other than the weeping prophet; and yet in the very book which is called "Lamentations," clear as the song of Miriam when she dashed her fingers against the tabor, shrill as the note of Deborah when she met Barak with shouts of victory, we hear the voice of Jeremy going up to heaven—"Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life." O children of God, seek after a vital experience of the Lord's lovingkindness, and when you have it, speak positively of it; sing gratefully; shout triumphantly.

*And grieve not the holy Spirit of God,
whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

Ephesians 4:30

ALL that the believer has must come from Christ, but it comes solely through the channel of the Spirit of grace. Moreover, as all blessings thus flow to you through the Holy Spirit, so also no good thing can come out of you in holy thought, devout worship, or gracious act, apart from the sanctifying operation of the same Spirit. Even if the good seed be sown in you, yet it lies dormant except He worketh in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure. Do you desire to speak for Jesus—how can you unless the Holy Ghost touch your tongue? Do you desire to pray? Alas! what dull work it is unless the Spirit maketh intercession for you! Do you desire to subdue sin? Would you be holy? Would you imitate your Master? Do you desire to rise to superlative heights of spirituality? Are you wanting to be made like the angels of God, full of zeal and ardour for the Master's cause? You cannot without the Spirit—"Without me ye can do nothing." O branch of the vine, thou canst have no fruit without the sap! O child of God, thou hast no life within thee apart from the life which God gives thee through His Spirit! Then let us not grieve Him or provoke Him to anger by our sin. Let us not quench Him in one of His faintest motions in our soul; let us foster every suggestion, and be ready to obey every prompting. If the Holy Spirit be indeed so mighty, let us attempt nothing without Him; let us begin no project, and carry on no enterprise, and conclude no transaction, without imploring His blessing. Let us do Him the due homage of feeling our entire weakness apart from Him, and then depending alone upon Him, having this for our prayer, "Open Thou my heart and my whole being to Thine incoming, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit when I shall have received that Spirit in my inward parts."

*And Jacob fled into the country of Syria,
and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.*

Hosea 12:12

JACOB, while expostulating with Laban, thus describes his own toil, "This twenty years have I been with thee. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee: I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." Even more toilsome than this was the life of our Saviour here below. He watched over all His sheep till He gave in as His last account, "Of all those whom Thou hast given me I have lost none." His hair was wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night. Sleep departed from His eyes, for all night He was in prayer wrestling for His people. One night Peter must be pleaded for; anon, another claims His tearful intercession. No shepherd sitting beneath the cold skies, looking up to the stars, could ever utter such complaints because of the hardness of his toil as Jesus Christ might have brought, if He had chosen to do so, because of the sternness of His service in order to procure His spouse—

"Cold mountains and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer;
The desert His temptations knew,
His conflict and His victory too."

It is sweet to dwell upon the spiritual parallel of Laban having required all the sheep at Jacob's hand. If they were torn of beasts, Jacob must make it good; if any of them died, he must stand as surety for the whole. Was not the toil of Jesus for His Church the toil of one who was under suretiship obligations to bring every believing one safe to the hand of Him who had committed them to His charge? Look upon toiling Jacob, and you see a representation of Him of whom we read, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd."

*If we say that we have fellowship with him,
and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:
1 John 1:6*

WHEN we were united by faith to Christ, we were brought into such complete fellowship with Him, that we were made one with Him, and His interests and ours became mutual and identical. We have fellowship with Christ in His *love*. What He loves we love. He loves the saints—so do we. He loves sinners—so do we. He loves the poor perishing race of man, and pants to see earth's deserts transformed into the garden of the Lord—so do we. We have fellowship with Him in His *desires*. He desires the glory of God—we also labour for the same. He desires that the saints may be with Him where He is—we desire to be with Him there too. He desires to drive out sin—behold we fight under His banner. He desires that His Father's name may be loved and adored by all His creatures—we pray daily, "Let Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven." We have fellowship with Christ in His *sufferings*. We are not nailed to the cross, nor do we die a cruel death, but when He is reproached, we are reproached; and a very sweet thing it is to be blamed for His sake, to be despised for following the Master, to have the world against us. The disciple should not be above His Lord. In our measure we commune with Him in His *labours*, ministering to men by the word of truth and by deeds of love. Our meat and our drink, like His, is to do the will of Him who hath sent us and to finish His work. We have also fellowship with Christ in His *joys*. We are happy in His happiness, we rejoice in His exaltation. Have you ever tasted that joy, believer? There is no purer or more thrilling delight to be known this side heaven than that of having Christ's joy fulfilled in us, that our joy may be full. His *glory* awaits us to complete our fellowship, for His Church shall sit with him upon His throne, as His well-beloved bride and queen.

*But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad
rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars,
neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.
Isaiah 33:21*

BRoad rivers and streams produce fertility, and abundance in the land. Places near broad rivers are remarkable for the variety of their plants and their plentiful harvests. God is all this to His Church. Having God she has *abundance*. What can she ask for that He will not give her? What want can she mention which He will not supply? “In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things.” Want ye the bread of life? It drops like manna from the sky. Want ye refreshing streams? The rock follows you, and that Rock is Christ. If you suffer any want it is your own fault; if you are straitened you are not straitened in Him, but in your own bowels. Broad rivers and streams also point to *commerce*. Our glorious Lord is to us a place of heavenly merchandize. Through our Redeemer we have commerce with the past; the wealth of Calvary, the treasures of the covenant, the riches of the ancient days of election, the stores of eternity, all come to us down the broad stream of our gracious Lord. We have commerce, too, with the future. What galleys, laden to the water’s edge, come to us from the millennium! What visions we have of the days of heaven upon earth! Through our glorious Lord we have commerce with angels; communion with the bright spirits washed in blood, who sing before the throne; nay, better still, we have fellowship with the Infinite One. Broad rivers and streams are specially intended to set forth the idea of *security*. Rivers were of old a defence. Oh! beloved, what a defence is God to His Church! The devil cannot cross this broad river of God. How he wishes he could turn the current, but fear not, for God abideth immutably the same. Satan may worry, but he cannot destroy us; no galley with oars shall invade our river, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me
to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the
brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty them that are bruised,
Luke 4.18*

NONE but Jesus can give deliverance to captives. Real liberty cometh from Him only. It is a liberty *righteously bestowed*; for the Son, who is Heir of all things, has a right to make men free. The saints honour the justice of God, which now secures their salvation. It is a liberty which has been *dearly purchased*. Christ speaks it by His power, but He bought it by His blood. He makes thee free, but it is by His own bonds. Thou goest clear, because He bare thy burden for thee: thou art set at liberty, because He has suffered in thy stead. But, though dearly purchased, *He freely gives it*. Jesus asks nothing of us as a preparation for this liberty. He finds us sitting in sackcloth and ashes, and bids us put on the beautiful array of freedom; He saves us just as we are, and all without our help or merit. When Jesus sets free, the liberty is *perpetually entailed*; no chains can bind again. Let the Master say to me, "Captive, I have delivered thee," and it is done for ever. Satan may plot to enslave us, but if the Lord be on our side, whom shall we fear? The world, with its temptations, may seek to ensnare us, but mightier is He who is for us than all they who be against us. The machinations of our own deceitful hearts may harass and annoy us, but He who hath begun the good work in us will carry it on and perfect it to the end. The foes of God and the enemies of man may gather their hosts together, and come with concentrated fury against us, but if God acquitteth, who is he that condemneth? Not more free is the eagle which mounts to his rocky eyrie, and afterwards outsoars the clouds, than the soul which Christ hath delivered. If we are no more under the law, but free from its curse, let our liberty be *practically exhibited* in our serving God with gratitude and delight. "I am Thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds." "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;
for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom,
in the grave, whither thou goest.*

Ecclesiastes 9:10

“**WHATSOEVER** thy hand findeth to do,” refers to works that are *possible*. There are many things which our heart findeth to do which we never shall do. It is well it is in our heart; but if we would be eminently useful, we must not be content with forming schemes in our heart, and talking of them; we must practically carry out “*whatsoever our hand findeth to do.*” One good deed is more worth than a thousand brilliant theories. Let us not wait for large opportunities, or for a different kind of work, but do just the things we “find to do” day by day. We have no other time in which to live. The past is gone; the future has not arrived; we never shall have any time but time *present*. Then do not wait until your experience has ripened into maturity before you attempt to serve God. Endeavour now to bring forth fruit. Serve God now, but be careful as to the way in which you perform what you find to do—“*do it with thy might.*” Do it *promptly*; do not fritter away your life in thinking of what you intend to do tomorrow as if that could recompense for the idleness of today. No man ever served God by doing things tomorrow. If we honour Christ and are blessed, it is by the things which we do *today*. Whatever you do for Christ throw your whole soul into it. Do not give Christ a little slurred labour, done as a matter of course now and then; but when you do serve Him, do it with heart, and soul, and strength.

But where is the might of a Christian? It is not in himself, for he is perfect weakness. His might lieth in the Lord of Hosts. Then let us seek His help; let us proceed with prayer and faith, and when we have done what our “hand findeth to do,” let us wait upon the Lord for His blessing. What we do thus will be well done, and will not fail in its effect.

*And he shewed me Joshua the high priest
standing before the angel of the LORD,
and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.
Zechariah 3:1*

IN Joshua *the high priest* we see a picture of each and every child of God, who has been made nigh by the blood of Christ, and has been taught to minister in holy things, and enter into that which is within the veil. Jesus has made us priests and kings unto God, and even here upon earth we exercise the priesthood of consecrated living and hallowed service. But this high priest is said to be “*standing before the angel of the Lord,*” that is, standing to minister. This should be the perpetual position of every true believer. Every place is now God’s temple, and His people can as truly serve Him in their daily employments as in His house. They are to be always “*ministering,*” offering the spiritual sacrifice of prayer and praise, and presenting themselves a “*living sacrifice.*” But notice where it is that Joshua stands to minister, it is *before the angel* of Jehovah. It is only through a mediator that we poor defiled ones can ever become priests unto God. I present what I have before the messenger, the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus; and through Him my prayers find acceptance wrapped up in *His* prayers; my praises become sweet as they are bound up with bundles of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia from Christ’s own garden. If I can bring Him nothing but my tears, He will put them with His own tears in His own bottle for He once wept; if I can bring Him nothing but my groans and sighs, He will accept these as an acceptable sacrifice, for He once was broken in heart, and sighed heavily in spirit. I myself, standing in Him, am accepted in the Beloved; and all my polluted works, though in themselves only objects of divine abhorrence, are so received, that God smelleth a sweet savour. He is content and I am blessed. See, then, the position of the Christian—“a priest—standing—before the angel of the Lord.”

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

3 John 3

THE truth was in Gaius, and Gaius walked in the truth. If the first had not been the case, the second could never have occurred; and if the second could not be said of him the first would have been a mere pretence. Truth must enter into the soul, penetrate and saturate it, or else it is of no value. Doctrines held as a matter of creed are like bread in the hand, which ministers no nourishment to the frame; but doctrine accepted by the heart, is as food digested, which, by assimilation, sustains and builds up the body. In us truth must be a living force, an active energy, an indwelling reality, a part of the woof and warp of our being. If it be *in us*, we cannot henceforth part with it. A man may lose his garments or his limbs, but his inward parts are vital, and cannot be torn away without absolute loss of life. A Christian can die, but he cannot deny the truth. Now it is a rule of nature that the inward affects the outward, as light shines from the centre of the lantern through the glass: when, therefore, the truth is kindled within, its brightness soon beams forth in the outward life and conversation. It is said that the food of certain worms colours the cocoons of silk which they spin: and just so the nutriment upon which a man's inward nature lives gives a tinge to every word and deed proceeding from him. To walk in the truth, imports a life of integrity, holiness, faithfulness, and simplicity—the natural product of those principles of truth which the gospel teaches, and which the Spirit of God enables us to receive. We may judge of the secrets of the soul by their manifestation in the man's conversation. Be it ours today, O gracious Spirit, to be ruled and governed by Thy divine authority, so that nothing false or sinful may reign in our hearts, lest it extend its malignant influence to our daily walk among men.

Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

Leviticus 19:16, 17

TALE-BEARING emits a threefold poison; for it injures the teller, the hearer, and the person concerning whom the tale is told. Whether the report be true or false, we are by this precept of God's Word forbidden to spread it. The reputations of the Lord's people should be very precious in our sight, and we should count it shame to help the devil to dishonour the Church and the name of the Lord. Some tongues need a bridle rather than a spur. Many glory in pulling down their brethren, as if thereby they raised themselves. Noah's wise sons cast a mantle over their father, and he who exposed him earned a fearful curse. We may ourselves one of these dark days need forbearance and silence from our brethren, let us render it cheerfully to those who require it now. Be this our family rule, and our personal bond—SPEAK EVIL OF NO MAN.

The Holy Spirit, however, permits us to censure sin, and prescribes the way in which we are to do it. It must be done by rebuking our brother to his face, not by railing behind his back. This course is manly, brotherly, Christlike, and under God's blessing will be useful. Does the flesh shrink from it? Then we must lay the greater stress upon our conscience, and keep ourselves to the work, lest by suffering sin upon our friend we become ourselves partakers of it. Hundreds have been saved from gross sins by the timely, wise, affectionate warnings of faithful ministers and brethren. Our Lord Jesus has set us a gracious example of how to deal with erring friends in His warning given to Peter, the prayer with which He preceded it, and the gentle way in which He bore with Peter's boastful denial that he needed such a caution.

And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?

And the man of God answered,

The LORD is able to give thee much more than this.

2 Chronicles 25:9

A very important question this seemed to be to the king of Judah, and possibly it is of even more weight with the tried and tempted Christian. To lose money is at no times pleasant, and when principle involves it, the flesh is not always ready to make the sacrifice. "Why lose that which may be so usefully employed? May not the truth itself be bought too dear? What shall we do without it? Remember the children, and our small income!" All these things and a thousand more would tempt the Christian to put forth his hand to unrighteous gain, or stay himself from carrying out his conscientious convictions, when they involve serious loss. All men cannot view these matters in the light of faith; and even with the followers of Jesus, the doctrine of "we must live" has quite sufficient weight.

The Lord is able to give thee much more than this is a very satisfactory answer to the anxious question. Our Father holds the purse-strings, and what we lose for His sake He can repay a thousand-fold. It is ours to obey His will, and we may rest assured that He will provide for us. The Lord will be no man's debtor at the last. Saints know that a grain of heart's-ease is of more value than a ton of gold. He who wraps a threadbare coat about a good conscience has gained a spiritual wealth far more desirable than any he has lost. God's smile and a dungeon are enough for a true heart; His frown and a palace would be hell to a gracious spirit. Let the worst come to the worst, let all the talents go, we have not lost our treasure, for that is above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Meanwhile, even now, the Lord maketh the meek to inherit the earth, and no good thing doth He withhold from them that walk uprightly.

*Thou hast set all the borders of the earth:
thou hast made summer and winter.
Psalm 74:17*

MY soul begin this wintry month with thy God. The cold snows and the piercing winds all remind thee that He keeps His covenant with day and night, and tend to assure thee that He will also keep that glorious covenant which He has made with thee in the person of Christ Jesus. He who is true to His Word in the revolutions of the seasons of this poor sin-polluted world, will not prove unfaithful in His dealings with His own well-beloved Son.

Winter in the soul is by no means a comfortable season, and if it be upon thee just now it will be very painful to thee: but there is this comfort, namely, that *the Lord* makes it. He sends the sharp blasts of adversity to nip the buds of expectation: He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes over the once verdant meadows of our joy: He casteth forth His ice like morsels freezing the streams of our delight. He does it all, He is the great Winter King, and rules in the realms of frost, and therefore thou canst not murmur. Losses, crosses, heaviness, sickness, poverty, and a thousand other ills, are of the Lord's sending, and come to us with wise design. Frosts kill noxious insects, and put a bound to raging diseases; they break up the clods, and sweeten the soul. O that such good results would always follow our winters of affliction!

How we prize the fire just now! how pleasant is its cheerful glow! Let us in the same manner prize our Lord, who is the constant source of warmth and comfort in every time of trouble. Let us draw nigh to Him, and in Him find joy and peace in believing. Let us wrap ourselves in the warm garments of His promises, and go forth to labours which befit the season, for it were ill to be as the sluggard who will not plough by reason of the cold; for he shall beg in summer and have nothing.

Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

Song of Solomon 4:7

THE Lord's admiration of His Church is very wonderful, and His description of her beauty is very glowing. She is not merely *fair*, but "all fair." He views her in Himself, washed in His sin-atoning blood and clothed in His meritorious righteousness, and He considers her to be full of comeliness and beauty. No wonder that such is the case, since it is but His own perfect excellency that He admires; for the holiness, glory, and perfection of His Church are His own glorious garments on the back of His own well-beloved spouse. She is not simply pure, or well-proportioned; she is positively lovely and fair! She has actual merit! Her deformities of sin are removed; but more, she has through her Lord obtained a meritorious righteousness by which an actual beauty is conferred upon her. Believers have a positive righteousness given to them when they become "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Nor is the Church barely lovely, she is *superlatively so*. Her Lord styles her "Thou fairest among women." She has a real worth and excellence which cannot be rivalled by all the nobility and royalty of the world. If Jesus could exchange His elect bride for all the queens and empresses of earth, or even for the angels in heaven, He would not, for He puts her first and foremost—"fairest among women." Like the moon she far outshines the stars. Nor is this an opinion which He is ashamed of, for He invites all men to hear it. He sets a "behold" before it, a special note of exclamation, inviting and arresting attention. "*Behold*, thou art fair, my love; *behold*, thou art fair" (Song of Sol. 4:1). His opinion He publishes abroad even now, and one day from the throne of His glory He will avow the truth of it before the assembled universe. "Come, ye blessed of my Father" (Matt. 25:34), will be His solemn affirmation of the loveliness of His elect.

Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

Song of Solomon 4:7

HAVING pronounced His Church positively full of beauty, our Lord confirms His praise by a precious negative, "There is no spot in thee." As if the thought occurred to the Bridegroom that the carping world would insinuate that He had only mentioned her comely parts, and had purposely omitted those features which were deformed or defiled, He sums up all by declaring her universally and entirely fair, and utterly devoid of stain. A spot may soon be removed, and is the very least thing that can disfigure beauty, but even from this little blemish the believer is delivered in his Lord's sight. If He had said there is no hideous scar, no horrible deformity, no deadly ulcer, we might even then have marvelled; but when He testifies that she is free from the slightest spot, all these other forms of defilement are included, and the depth of wonder is increased. If He had but promised to remove all spots by-and-by, we should have had eternal reason for joy; but when He speaks of it as already done, who can restrain the most intense emotions of satisfaction and delight? O my soul, here is marrow and fatness for thee; eat thy full, and be satisfied with royal dainties.

Christ Jesus has no quarrel with His spouse. She often wanders from Him, and grieves His Holy Spirit, but He does not allow her faults to affect His love. He sometimes chides, but it is always in the tenderest manner, with the kindest intentions: it is "my love" even then. There is no remembrance of our follies, He does not cherish ill thoughts of us, but He pardons and loves as well after the offence as before it. It is well for us it is so, for if Jesus were as mindful of injuries as we are, how could He commune with us? Many a time a believer will put himself out of humour with the Lord for some slight turn in providence, but our precious Husband knows our silly hearts too well to take any offence at our ill manners.

*For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:
for I have much people in this city.*

Acts 18:10

THIS should be a great encouragement to try to do good, since God has among the vilest of the vile, the most reprobate, the most debauched and drunken, an elect people who *must* be saved. When you take the Word to them, you do so because God has ordained you to be the messenger of life to their souls, and *they must* receive it, for so the decree of predestination runs. They are as much redeemed by blood as the saints before the eternal throne. They are Christ's property, and yet perhaps they are lovers of the ale-house, and haters of holiness; but if Jesus Christ purchased them He will have them. God is not unfaithful to forget the price which His Son has paid. He will not suffer His substitution to be in any case an ineffectual, dead thing. Tens of thousands of redeemed ones are not regenerated yet, but regenerated they must be; and this is our comfort when we go forth to them with the quickening Word of God.

Nay, more, these ungodly ones are prayed for by Christ before the throne. "Neither pray I for these alone," saith the great Intercessor, "but for *them also which shall believe on Me through their word.*" Poor, ignorant souls, they know nothing about prayer for themselves, but Jesus prays for them. Their names are on His breastplate, and ere long they must bow their stubborn knee, breathing the penitential sigh before the throne of grace. "The time of figs is not yet." The predestinated moment has not struck; but, when it comes, *they shall obey*, for God will have His own; *they must*, for the Spirit is not to be withstood when He cometh forth with fulness of power—*they must* become the willing servants of the living God. "My people shall be willing in the day of my power." "He shall justify many." "He shall see of the travail of His soul." "I will divide him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong."

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you:*

Matthew 7:7

WE know of a place in England still existing, where a dole of bread is served to every passerby who chooses to ask for it. Whoever the traveller may be, he has but to knock at the door of St. Cross Hospital, and there is the dole of bread for him. Jesus Christ so loveth sinners that He has built a St. Cross Hospital, so that whenever a sinner is hungry, he has but to knock and have his wants supplied. Nay, He has done better; He has attached to this Hospital of the Cross a bath; and whenever a soul is black and filthy, it has but to go there and be washed. The fountain is always full, always efficacious. No sinner ever went into it and found that it could not wash away his stains. Sins which were scarlet and crimson have all disappeared, and the sinner has been whiter than snow. As if this were not enough, there is attached to this Hospital of the Cross a wardrobe, and a sinner making application simply as a sinner, may be clothed from head to foot; and if he wishes to be a soldier, he may not merely have a garment for ordinary wear, but armour which shall cover him from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. If he asks for a sword, he shall have that given to him, and a shield too. Nothing that is good for him shall be denied him. He shall have spending-money so long as he lives, and he shall have an eternal heritage of glorious treasure when he enters into the joy of his Lord.

If all these things are to be had by merely knocking at mercy's door, O my soul, knock hard this morning, and ask large things of thy generous Lord. Leave not the throne of grace till all thy wants have been spread before the Lord, and until by faith thou hast a comfortable prospect that they shall be all supplied. No bashfulness need retard when Jesus invites. No unbelief should hinder when Jesus promises. No cold-heartedness should restrain when such blessings are to be obtained.

*As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy:
and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.
1 Corinthians 15:48*

THE head and members are of one nature, and not like that monstrous image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. The head was of fine gold, but the belly and thighs were of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet, part of iron and part of clay. Christ's mystical body is no absurd combination of opposites; the members were mortal, and therefore Jesus died; the glorified head is immortal, and therefore the body is immortal too, for thus the record stands, "Because I live, ye shall live also." As is our loving Head, such is the body, and every member in particular. A chosen Head and chosen members; an accepted Head, and accepted members; a living Head, and living members. If the head be pure gold, all the parts of the body are of pure gold also. Thus is there a double union of nature as a basis for the closest communion. Pause here, devout reader, and see if thou canst without ecstatic amazement, contemplate the infinite condescension of the Son of God in thus exalting thy wretchedness into blessed union with His glory. Thou art so mean that in remembrance of thy mortality, thou mayest say to corruption, "Thou art my father," and to the worm, "Thou art my sister"; and yet in Christ thou art so honoured that thou canst say to the Almighty, "Abba, Father," and to the Incarnate God, "Thou art my brother and my husband." Surely if relationships to ancient and noble families make men think highly of themselves, we have whereof to glory over the heads of them all. Let the poorest and most despised believer lay hold upon this privilege; let not a senseless indolence make him negligent to trace his pedigree, and let him suffer no foolish attachment to present vanities to occupy his thoughts to the exclusion of this glorious, this heavenly honour of union with Christ.

*And base things of the world, and things which are despised,
hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not,
to bring to nought things that are:
1 Corinthians 1:28*

WALK the streets by moonlight, if you dare, and you will see sinners then. Watch when the night is dark, and the wind is howling, and the picklock is grating in the door, and you will see sinners then. Go to yon jail, and walk through the wards, and mark the men with heavy over-hanging brows, men whom you would not like to meet at night, and there are sinners there. Go to the Reformatories, and note those who have betrayed a rampant juvenile depravity, and you will see sinners there. Go across the seas to the place where a man will gnaw a bone upon which is reeking human flesh, and there is a sinner there. Go where you will, you need not ransack earth to find sinners, for they are common enough; you may find them in every lane and street of every city, and town, and village, and hamlet. It is for such that Jesus died. If you will select me the grossest specimen of humanity, if he be but born of woman, I will have hope of him yet, because Jesus Christ is come to seek and to save *sinners*. Electing love has selected some of the worst to be made the best. Pebbles of the brook grace turns into jewels for the crown-royal. Worthless dross He transforms into pure gold. Redeeming love has set apart many of the worst of mankind to be the reward of the Saviour's passion. Effectual grace calls forth many of the vilest of the vile to sit at the table of mercy, and therefore let none despair.

Reader, by that love looking out of Jesus' tearful eyes, by that love streaming from those bleeding wounds, by that faithful love, that strong love, that pure, disinterested, and abiding love; by the heart and by the bowels of the Saviour's compassion, we conjure you turn not away as though it were nothing to you; but believe on Him and you shall be saved. Trust your soul with Him and He will bring you to His Father's right hand in glory everlasting.

*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled
their garments; and they shall walk with me in white:
for they are worthy.
Revelation 3:4*

WE may understand this to refer to *justification*. “They shall walk in white”; that is, they shall enjoy a constant sense of their own justification by faith; they shall understand that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them, that they have all been washed and made whiter than the newly-fallen snow.

Again, it refers to *joy and gladness*: for white robes were holiday dresses among the Jews. They who have not defiled their garments shall have their faces always bright; they shall understand what Solomon meant when he said “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. Let thy garments be always white, for God hath accepted thy works.” He who is accepted of God shall wear white garments of joy and gladness, while he walks in sweet communion with the Lord Jesus. Whence so many doubts, so much misery, and mourning? It is because so many believers defile their garments with sin and error, and hence they lose the joy of their salvation, and the comfortable fellowship of the Lord Jesus, they do not here below walk in white.

The promise also refers to *walking in white before the throne of God*. Those who have not defiled their garments here shall most certainly walk in white up yonder, where the white-robed hosts sing perpetual hallelujahs to the Most High. They shall possess joys inconceivable, happiness beyond a dream, bliss which imagination knoweth not, blessedness which even the stretch of desire hath not reached. The “undefiled in the way” shall have all this—not of merit, nor of works, but of grace. They shall walk with Christ in white, for He has made them “worthy.” In His sweet company they shall drink of the living fountains of waters.

And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.

Isaiah 30:18

GOD often DELAYS IN ANSWERING PRAYER. We have several instances of this in sacred Scripture. Jacob did not get the blessing from the angel until near the dawn of day—he had to wrestle all night for it. The poor woman of Syrophenicia was answered not a word for a long while. Paul besought the Lord *thrice* that “the thorn in the flesh” might be taken from him, and he received no assurance that it should be taken away, but instead thereof a promise that God’s grace should be sufficient for him. If thou hast been knocking at the gate of mercy, and hast received no answer, shall I tell thee why the mighty Maker hath not opened the door and let thee in? Our Father has reasons peculiar to Himself for thus keeping us waiting. Sometimes it is to show His power and His sovereignty, that men may know that Jehovah has a right to give or to withhold. More frequently the delay is for our profit. Thou art perhaps kept waiting in order that thy desires may be more fervent. God knows that delay will quicken and increase desire, and that if He keeps thee waiting thou wilt see thy necessity more clearly, and wilt seek more earnestly; and that thou wilt prize the mercy all the more for its long tarrying. There may also be something wrong in thee which has need to be removed, before the joy of the Lord is given. Perhaps thy views of the Gospel plan are confused, or thou mayest be placing some little reliance on thyself, instead of trusting simply and entirely to the Lord Jesus. Or, God makes thee tarry awhile that He may the more fully display the riches of His grace to thee at last. Thy prayers are all filed in heaven, and if not immediately answered they are certainly not forgotten, but in a little while shall be fulfilled to thy delight and satisfaction. Let not despair make thee silent, but continue instant in earnest supplication.

*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together
with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air:
and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

1 Thessalonians 4:17

EVEN the sweetest visits from Christ, how short they are—and how transitory! One moment our eyes see Him, and we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, but again a little time and we do not see Him, for our beloved withdraws Himself from us; like a roe or a young hart He leaps over the mountains of division; He is gone to the land of spices, and feeds no more among the lilies.

“If today He deigns to bless us
With a sense of pardoned sin,
He tomorrow may distress us,
Make us feel the plague within.”

Oh, how sweet the prospect of the time when we shall not behold Him at a distance, but see Him face to face: when He shall not be as a wayfaring man tarrying but for a night, but shall eternally enfold us in the bosom of His glory. We shall not see Him for a little season, but

“Millions of years our wondering eyes,
Shall o’er our Saviour’s beauties rove;
And myriad ages we’ll adore,
The wonders of His love.”

In heaven there shall be no interruptions from care or sin; no weeping shall dim our eyes; no earthly business shall distract our happy thoughts; we shall have nothing to hinder us from gazing for ever on the Sun of Righteousness with unwearied eyes. Oh, if it be so sweet to see Him now and then, how sweet to gaze on that blessed face for aye, and never have a cloud rolling between, and never have to turn one’s eyes away to look on a world of weariness and woe! Blest day, when wilt thou dawn? Rise, O unsetting sun! The joys of sense may leave us as soon as they will, for this shall make glorious amends. If to die is but to enter into uninterrupted communion with Jesus, then death is indeed gain, and the black drop is swallowed up in a sea of victory.

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

HEAVEN is a place where we shall never sin; where we shall cease our constant watch against an indefatigable enemy, because there will be no tempter to ensnare our feet. There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. Heaven is the “undefiled inheritance”; it is the land of perfect holiness, and therefore of complete security. But do not the saints even on earth sometimes taste the joys of blissful security? The doctrine of God’s word is, that all who are in union with the Lamb are safe; that all the righteous shall hold on their way; that those who have committed their souls to the keeping of Christ shall find Him a faithful and immutable preserver. Sustained by such a doctrine we can enjoy security even on earth; not that high and glorious security which renders us free from every slip, but that holy security which arises from the sure promise of Jesus that none who believe in Him shall ever perish, but shall be with Him where He is. Believer, let us often reflect with joy on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, and honour the faithfulness of our God by a holy confidence in Him.

May our God bring home to you a sense of your safety in Christ Jesus! May He assure you that your name is graven on His hand; and whisper in your ear the promise, “Fear not, I am with thee.” Look upon Him, the great Surety of the covenant, as faithful and true, and, therefore, bound and engaged to present you, the weakest of the family, with all the chosen race, before the throne of God; and in such a sweet contemplation you will drink the juice of the spiced wine of the Lord’s pomegranate, and taste the dainty fruits of Paradise. You will have an antepast of the enjoyments which ravish the souls of the perfect saints above, if you can believe with unstaggering faith that “faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.”

*He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld,
and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains
were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow:
his ways are everlasting.
Habakkuk 3:6*

WHAT He hath done at one time, He will do yet again. Man's ways are variable, but God's ways are everlasting. There are many reasons for this most comforting truth: among them are the following—the Lord's ways are *the result of wise deliberation*; He ordereth all things according to the counsel of His own will. Human action is frequently the hasty result of passion, or fear, and is followed by regret and alteration; but nothing can take the Almighty by surprise, or happen otherwise than He has foreseen. His ways are *the outgrowth of an immutable character*, and in them the fixed and settled attributes of God are clearly to be seen. Unless the Eternal One Himself can undergo change, His ways, which are Himself in action, must remain forever the same. Is He eternally just, gracious, faithful, wise, tender?—then His ways must ever be distinguished for the same excellences. Beings act according to their nature: when those natures change, their conduct varies also; but since God cannot know the shadow of a turning, His ways will abide everlastingly the same. Moreover there is no reason from without which could reverse the divine ways, since they are *the embodiment of irresistible might*. The earth is said, by the prophet, to be cleft with rivers, mountains tremble, the deep lifts up its hands, and sun and moon stand still, when Jehovah marches forth for the salvation of His people. Who can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou? But it is not might alone which gives stability; God's ways are *the manifestation of the eternal principles of right*, and therefore can never pass away. Wrong breeds decay and involves ruin, but the true and the good have about them a vitality which ages cannot diminish.

This morning let us go to our heavenly Father with confidence, remembering that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in Him the Lord is ever gracious to His people.

*Unto an hundred talents of silver,
and to an hundred measures of wheat,
and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil,
and salt without prescribing how much.*

Ezra 7:22

SALT was used in every offering made by fire unto the Lord, and from its preserving and purifying properties it was the grateful emblem of divine grace in the soul. It is worthy of our attentive regard that, when Artaxerxes gave salt to Ezra the priest, he set no limit to the quantity, and we may be quite certain that when the King of kings distributes grace among His royal priesthood, the supply is not cut short by *Him*. Often are we straitened in ourselves, but never in the Lord. He who chooses to gather much manna will find that he may have as much as he desires. There is no such famine in Jerusalem that the citizens should eat their bread by weight and drink their water by measure. Some things in the economy of grace are measured; for instance our vinegar and gall are given us with such exactness that we never have a single drop too much, but of the salt of grace no stint is made, "Ask what thou wilt and it shall be given unto thee." Parents need to lock up the fruit cupboard, and the sweet jars, but there is no need to keep the salt-box under lock and key, for few children will eat too greedily from that. A man may have too much money, or too much honour, but he cannot have too much grace. When Jeshurun waxed fat in the flesh, he kicked against God, but there is no fear of a man's becoming too full of grace: a *plethora* of grace is impossible. More wealth brings more care, but more grace brings more joy. Increased wisdom is increased sorrow, but abundance of the Spirit is fulness of joy. Believer, go to the throne for a large supply of heavenly salt. It will season thine afflictions, which are unsavoury without salt; it will preserve thy heart which corrupts if salt be absent, and it will kill thy sins even as salt kills reptiles. Thou needest much; seek much, and have much.

*They go from strength to strength,
every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*

Psalm 84:7

THEY go from strength to strength. There are various renderings of these words, but all of them contain the idea of progress.

Our own good translation of the authorized version is enough for us this morning. "They go from strength to strength." That is, they grow stronger and stronger. Usually, if we are walking, we go from strength to weakness; we start fresh and in good order for our journey, but by-and-by the road is rough, and the sun is hot, we sit down by the wayside, and then again painfully pursue our weary way. But the Christian pilgrim having obtained fresh supplies of grace, is as vigorous after years of toilsome travel and struggle as when he first set out. He may not be quite so elate and buoyant, nor perhaps quite so hot and hasty in his zeal as he once was, but he is much stronger in all that constitutes real power, and travels, if more slowly, far more surely. Some gray-haired veterans have been as firm in their grasp of truth, and as zealous in diffusing it, as they were in their younger days; but, alas, it must be confessed it is often otherwise, for the love of many waxes cold and iniquity abounds, but this is their own sin and not the fault of the promise which still holds good: "The youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Fretful spirits sit down and trouble themselves about the future. "Alas!" say they, "we go from affliction to affliction." Very true, O thou of little faith, but then thou goest from strength to strength also. Thou shalt never find a bundle of affliction which has not bound up in the midst of it sufficient grace. God will give the strength of ripe manhood with the burden allotted to full-grown shoulders.

*And they lifted up their voice, and wept again:
and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.
Ruth 1:14*

BOTH of them had an affection for Naomi, and therefore set out with her upon her return to the land of Judah. But the hour of test came; Naomi most unselfishly set before each of them the trials which awaited them, and bade them if they cared for ease and comfort to return to their Moabitish friends. At first both of them declared that they would cast in their lot with the Lord's people; but upon still further consideration Orpah with much grief and a respectful kiss left her mother in law, and her people, and her God, and went back to her idolatrous friends, while Ruth with all her heart gave herself up to the God of her mother in law. It is one thing to love the ways of the Lord when all is fair, and quite another to cleave to them under all discouragements and difficulties. The kiss of outward profession is very cheap and easy, but the practical cleaving to the Lord, which must show itself in holy decision for truth and holiness, is not so small a matter. How stands the case with us, is our heart fixed upon Jesus, is the sacrifice bound with cords to the horns of the altar? Have we counted the cost, and are we solemnly ready to suffer all worldly loss for the Master's sake? The after gain will be an abundant recompense, for Egypt's treasures are not to be compared with the glory to be revealed. Orpah is heard of no more; in glorious ease and idolatrous pleasure her life melts into the gloom of death; but Ruth lives in history and in heaven, for grace has placed her in the noble line whence sprung the King of kings. Blessed among women shall those be who for Christ's sake can renounce all; but forgotten and worse than forgotten shall those be who in the hour of temptation do violence to conscience and turn back unto the world. O that this morning we may not be content with the form of devotion, which may be no better than Orpah's kiss, but may the Holy Spirit work in us a cleaving of our whole heart to our Lord Jesus.

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*

Matthew 11:28

THE cry of the Christian religion is the gentle word, "Come." The Jewish law harshly said, "Go, take heed unto thy steps as to the path in which thou shalt walk. Break the commandments, and thou shalt perish; keep them, and thou shalt live." The law was a dispensation of terror, which drove men before it as with a scourge; the gospel draws with bands of love. Jesus is the good Shepherd going before His sheep, bidding them follow Him, and ever leading them onwards with the sweet word, "Come." The law repels, the gospel attracts. The law shows the distance which there is between God and man; the gospel bridges that awful chasm, and brings the sinner across it.

From the first moment of your spiritual life until you are ushered into glory, the language of Christ to you will be, "*Come, come* unto me." As a mother puts out her finger to her little child and woos it to walk by saying, "Come," even so does Jesus. He will always be ahead of you, bidding you follow Him as the soldier follows his captain. He will always go before you to pave your way, and clear your path, and you shall hear His animating voice calling you after Him all through life; while in the solemn hour of death, His sweet words with which He shall usher you into the heavenly world shall be—"Come, ye blessed of my Father."

Nay, further, this is not only Christ's cry to you, but, if you be a believer, this is your cry to Christ—"Come! come!" You will be longing for His second advent; you will be saying, "Come quickly, even so come Lord Jesus." You will be panting for nearer and closer communion with Him. As His voice to you is "Come," your response to Him will be, "Come, Lord, and abide with me. Come, and occupy alone the throne of my heart; reign there without a rival, and consecrate me entirely to Thy service."

Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

Jeremiah 2:2

LET us note that Christ delights to think upon His Church, and to look upon her beauty. As the bird returneth often to its nest, and as the wayfarer hastens to his home, so doth the mind continually pursue the object of its choice. We cannot look too often upon that face which we love; we desire always to have our precious things in our sight. It is even so with our Lord Jesus. From all eternity "His delights were with the sons of men"; His thoughts rolled onward to the time when His elect should be born into the world; He viewed them in the mirror of His foreknowledge. "In Thy book," He says, "all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:16). When the world was set upon its pillars, He was there, and He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. Many a time before His incarnation, He descended to this lower earth in the similitude of a man; on the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18), by the brook of Jabbok (Gen. 32:24-30), beneath the walls of Jericho (Josh. 5:13), and in the fiery furnace of Babylon (Dan. 3:19, 25), the Son of Man visited His people. Because His soul delighted in them, He could not rest away from them, for His heart longed after them. Never were they absent from His heart, for He had written their names upon His hands, and graven them upon His side. As the breastplate containing the names of the tribes of Israel was the most brilliant ornament worn by the high priest, so the names of Christ's elect were His most precious jewels, and glittered on His heart. We may often forget to meditate upon the perfections of our Lord, but He never ceases to remember us. Let us chide ourselves for past forgetfulness, and pray for grace ever to bear Him in fondest remembrance. Lord, paint upon the eyeballs of my soul the image of Thy Son.

And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Joel 2:13

GARMENT - RENDING and other outward signs of religious emotion, are *easily manifested* and are *frequently hypocritical*; but to feel true repentance is far more difficult, and consequently far less common. Men will attend to the most multiplied and minute ceremonial regulations—for such things are *pleasing to the flesh*—but true religion is too humbling, too heart-searching, too thorough for the tastes of the carnal men; they prefer something more ostentatious, flimsy, and worldly. Outward observances are *temporarily comfortable*; eye and ear are pleased; self-conceit is fed, and self-righteousness is puffed up: but they are *ultimately delusive*, for in the article of death, and at the day of judgment, the soul needs something more substantial than ceremonies and rituals to lean upon. Apart from vital godliness all religion is *utterly vain*; offered without a sincere heart, every form of worship is a solemn sham and an impudent mockery of the majesty of heaven.

HEART-RENDING is *divinely wrought* and *solemnly felt*. It is a secret grief which is personally experienced, not in mere form, but as a deep, soul-moving work of the Holy Spirit upon the inmost heart of each believer. It is not a matter to be merely talked of and believed in, but keenly and sensitively felt in every living child of the living God. It is *powerfully humiliating*, and *completely sin-purging*; but then it is sweetly preparative for those gracious consolations which proud unhumiliated spirits are unable to receive; and it is *distinctly discriminating*, for it belongs to the elect of God, and to them alone.

The text commands us to rend our hearts, but they are naturally hard as marble: how, then, can this be done? We must take them to Calvary: a dying Saviour's voice rent the rocks once, and it is as powerful now. O blessed Spirit, let us hear the death-cries of Jesus, and our hearts shall be rent even as men rend their vestures in the day of lamentation.

*The lot is cast into the lap;
but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.
Proverbs 16:33*

IF the disposal of the lot is the Lord's whose is the arrangement of our whole life? If the simple casting of a lot is guided by Him, how much more the events of our entire life—especially when we are told by our blessed Saviour: “The very hairs of your head are all numbered: not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father.” It would bring a holy calm over your mind, dear friend, if you were always to remember this. It would so relieve your mind from anxiety, that you would be the better able to walk in patience, quiet, and cheerfulness as a Christian should. When a man is anxious he cannot pray with faith; when he is troubled about the world, he cannot serve his Master, his thoughts are serving himself. If you would “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” all things would then be added unto you. You are meddling with Christ's business, and neglecting your own when you fret about your lot and circumstances. You have been trying “providing” work and forgetting that it is yours to obey. Be wise and attend to the obeying, and let Christ manage the providing. Come and survey your Father's storehouse, and ask whether He will let you starve while He has laid up so great an abundance in His garner? Look at His heart of mercy; see if that can ever prove unkind! Look at His inscrutable wisdom; see if that will ever be at fault. Above all, look up to Jesus Christ your Intercessor, and ask yourself, while He pleads, can your Father deal ungraciously with you? If He remembers even sparrows, will He forget one of the least of His poor children? “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

My soul, rest happy in thy low estate,
Nor hope nor wish to be esteem'd or great;
To take the impress of the Will Divine,
Be that thy glory, and those riches thine.

*The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying,
Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love:
therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.
Jeremiah 31:3*

SOMETIMES the Lord Jesus tells His Church His love thoughts. “He does not think it enough behind her back to tell it, but in her very presence He says, ‘Thou art all fair, my love.’ It is true, this is not His ordinary method; He is a wise lover, and knows when to keep back the intimation of love and when to let it out; but there are times when He will make no secret of it; times when He will put it beyond all dispute in the souls of His people” (R. Erskine’s Sermons). The Holy Spirit is often pleased, in a most gracious manner, to witness with our spirits of the love of Jesus. He takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us. No voice is heard from the clouds, and no vision is seen in the night, but we have a testimony more sure than either of these. If an angel should fly from heaven and inform the saint personally of the Saviour’s love to him, the evidence would not be one whit more satisfactory than that which is borne in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Ask those of the Lord’s people who have lived the nearest to the gates of heaven, and they will tell you that they have had seasons when the love of Christ towards them has been a fact so clear and sure, that they could no more doubt it than they could question their own existence. Yes, beloved believer, you and I have had times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and then our faith has mounted to the topmost heights of assurance. We have had confidence to lean our heads upon the bosom of our Lord, and we have no more questioned our Master’s affection to us than John did when in that blessed posture; nay, nor so much: for the dark question, “Lord, is it I that shall betray thee?” has been put far from us. He has kissed us with the kisses of His mouth, and killed our doubts by the closeness of His embrace. His love has been sweeter than wine to our souls.

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 he make it not to grow.
2 Samuel 23:5

THIS covenant is *divine in its origin*. “HE hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” Oh that great word HE! Stop, my soul. God, the everlasting Father, has positively made a covenant with thee; yes, that God who spake the world into existence by a word; He, stooping from His majesty, takes hold of thy hand and makes a covenant with thee. Is it not a deed, the stupendous condescension of which might ravish our hearts forever if we could really understand it? “HE hath made with me a covenant.” A king has not made a covenant with me—that were somewhat; but the Prince of the kings of the earth, Shaddai, the Lord All-sufficient, the Jehovah of ages, the everlasting Elohim, “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” But notice, *it is particular in its application*. “Yet hath He made with ME an everlasting covenant.” Here lies the sweetness of it to each believer. It is nought for me that He made peace for the world; I want to know whether He made peace for me! It is little that He hath made a covenant, I want to know whether He has made a covenant *with me*. Blessed is the assurance that He hath made a covenant with me! If God the Holy Ghost gives me assurance of this, then His salvation is mine, His heart is mine, He Himself is mine—*He is my God*.

This covenant is *everlasting in its duration*. An everlasting covenant means a covenant which had no beginning, and which shall never, never end. How sweet amidst all the uncertainties of life, to know that “the foundation of the Lord standeth sure,” and to have God’s own promise, “My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” Like dying David, I will sing of this, even though my house be not so with God as my heart desireth.

*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed;
for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;
yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.
Isaiah 41:10*

GOD has a strong reserve with which to discharge this engagement; for He is able to do all things. Believer, till thou canst drain dry the ocean of omnipotence, till thou canst break into pieces the towering mountains of almighty strength, thou never needest to fear. Think not that the strength of man shall ever be able to overcome the power of God. Whilst the earth's huge pillars stand, thou hast enough reason to abide firm in thy faith. The same God who directs the earth in its orbit, who feeds the burning furnace of the sun, and trims the lamps of heaven, has promised to supply thee with daily strength. While He is able to uphold the universe, dream not that He will prove unable to fulfil His own promises. Remember what He did in the days of old, in the former generations. Remember how He spake and it was done; how He commanded, and it stood fast. Shall He that created the world grow weary? He hangeth the world upon nothing; shall He who doeth this be unable to support His children? Shall He be unfaithful to His word for want of power? Who is it that restrains the tempest? Doth not He ride upon the wings of the wind, and make the clouds His chariots, and hold the ocean in the hollow of His hand? How can He fail thee? When He has put such a faithful promise as this on record, wilt thou for a moment indulge the thought that He has outpromised Himself, and gone beyond His power to fulfill? Ah, no! Thou canst doubt no longer.

O thou who art my God and my strength, I can believe that this promise shall be fulfilled, for the boundless reservoir of Thy grace can never be exhausted, and the overflowing storehouse of Thy strength can never be emptied by Thy friends or rifled by Thine enemies.

“Now let the feeble all be strong,
And make Jehovah's arm their song.”

*But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room;
that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee,
Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the
presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

Luke 14:10

WHEN first the life of grace begins in the soul, we do indeed draw near to God, but it is with great fear and trembling. The soul conscious of guilt, and humbled thereby, is overawed with the solemnity of its position; it is cast to the earth by a sense of the grandeur of Jehovah, in whose presence it stands. With unfeigned bashfulness it takes the lowest room.

But, in after life, as the Christian grows in grace, although he will never forget the solemnity of his position, and will never lose that holy awe which must encompass a gracious man when he is in the presence of the God who can create or can destroy; yet his fear has all its terror taken out of it; it becomes a holy reverence, and no more an overshadowing dread. He is called up higher, to greater access to God in Christ Jesus. Then the man of God, walking amid the splendours of Deity, and veiling his face like the glorious cherubim, with those twin wings, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, will, reverent and bowed in spirit, approach the throne; and seeing there a God of love, of goodness, and of mercy, he will realize rather the covenant character of God than His absolute Deity. He will see in God rather His goodness than His greatness, and more of His love than of His majesty. Then will the soul, bowing still as humbly as aforetime, enjoy a more sacred liberty of intercession; for while prostrate before the glory of the Infinite God, it will be sustained by the refreshing consciousness of being in the presence of boundless mercy and infinite love, and by the realization of acceptance "in the Beloved." Thus the believer is bidden to come up higher, and is enabled to exercise the privilege of rejoicing in God, and drawing near to Him in holy confidence, saying, "Abba, Father."

"So may we go from strength to strength,
And daily grow in grace,
Till in Thine image raised at length,
We see Thee face to face."

*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that,
though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,
that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

2 Corinthians 8:9

THE Lord Jesus Christ was eternally *rich*, glorious, and exalted; but “though *He was rich*, yet for your sakes He became poor.” As the rich saint cannot be true in his communion with his poor brethren unless of his substance he ministers to their necessities, so (the same rule holding with the head as between the members), it is impossible that our Divine Lord could have had fellowship with us unless He had imparted to us of His own abounding wealth, and had become poor to make us rich. Had He remained upon His throne of glory, and had we continued in the ruins of the fall without receiving His salvation, communion would have been impossible on both sides. Our position by the fall, apart from the covenant of grace, made it as impossible for fallen man to communicate with God as it is for Belial to be in concord with Christ. In order, therefore, that communion might be compassed, it was necessary that the rich kinsman should bestow his estate upon his poor relatives, that the righteous Saviour should give to His sinning brethren of His own perfection, and that we, the poor and guilty, should receive of His fulness grace for grace; that thus in giving and receiving, the One might descend from the heights, and the other ascend from the depths, and so be able to embrace each other in true and hearty fellowship. Poverty must be enriched by Him in whom are infinite treasures before it can venture to commune; and guilt must lose itself in imputed and imparted righteousness ere the soul can walk in fellowship with purity. Jesus must clothe His people in His own garments, or He cannot admit them into His palace of glory; and He must wash them in His own blood, or else they will be too defiled for the embrace of His fellowship.

O believer, herein is love! For *your sake* the Lord Jesus “became poor” that He might lift you up into communion with Himself.

*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel.*

Isaiah 7:14

LET us today go down to Bethlehem, and in company with wondering shepherds and adoring Magi, let us see Him who was born King of the Jews, for we by faith can claim an interest in Him, and can sing, “*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.*” Jesus is Jehovah incarnate, our Lord and our God, and yet our brother and friend; let us adore and admire. Let us notice at the very first glance *His miraculous conception*. It was a thing unheard of before, and unparalleled since, that a virgin should conceive and bear a Son. The first promise ran thus, “*The seed of the woman,*” not the offspring of the man. Since venturous woman led the way in the sin which brought forth Paradise lost, she, and she alone, ushers in the Regainer of Paradise. Our Saviour, although truly man, was as to His human nature the Holy One of God. Let us reverently bow before the holy Child whose innocence restores to manhood its ancient glory; and let us pray that He may be formed in us, the hope of glory. Fail not to note *His humble parentage*. His mother has been described simply as “a virgin,” not a princess, or prophetess, nor a matron of large estate. True the blood of kings ran in her veins; nor was her mind a weak and untaught one, for she could sing most sweetly a song of praise; but yet how humble her position, how poor the man to whom she stood affianced, and how miserable the accommodation afforded to the new-born King!

Immanuel, God with us in our nature, in our sorrow, in our lifework, in our punishment, in our grave, and now with us, or rather we with Him, in resurrection, ascension, triumph, and Second Advent splendour.

*And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul;
the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

1 Corinthians 15:45

JESUS is the federal head of His elect. As in Adam, every heir of flesh and blood has a personal interest, because he is the covenant head and representative of the race as considered under the law of works; so under the law of grace, every redeemed soul is one with the Lord from heaven, since He is the Second Adam, the Sponsor and Substitute of the elect in the new covenant of love. The apostle Paul declares that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedek met him: it is a certain truth that the believer was in the loins of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, when in old eternity the covenant settlements of grace were decreed, ratified, and made sure forever. Thus, whatever Christ hath done, He hath wrought for the whole body of His Church. We were crucified in Him and buried with Him (read Col. 2:10-13), and to make it still more wonderful, we are risen with Him and even ascended with Him to the seats on high (Eph. 2:6). It is thus that the Church has fulfilled the law, and is “accepted in *the beloved*.” It is thus that she is regarded with complacency by the just Jehovah, for He views her in Jesus, and does not look upon her as separate from her covenant head. As the Anointed Redeemer of Israel, Christ Jesus has nothing distinct from His Church, but all that He has He holds for her. Adam’s righteousness was ours so long as he maintained it, and his sin was ours the moment that he committed it; and in the same manner, all that the Second Adam is or does, is ours as well as His, seeing that He is our representative. Here is the foundation of the covenant of grace. This gracious system of representation and substitution, which moved Justin Martyr to cry out, “O blessed change, O sweet permutation!” this is the very groundwork of the gospel of our salvation, and is to be received with strong faith and rapturous joy.

*Can the rush grow up without mire?
can the flag grow without water?
Job 8:11*

THE rush is spongy and hollow, and even so is a hypocrite; there is no substance or stability in him. It is shaken to and fro in every wind just as formalists yield to every influence; for this reason the rush is not broken by the tempest, neither are hypocrites troubled with persecution. I would not willingly be a deceiver or be deceived; perhaps the text for this day may help me to try myself whether I be a hypocrite or no. The rush by nature lives in water, and owes its very existence to the mire and moisture wherein it has taken root; let the mire become dry, and the rush withers very quickly. Its greenness is absolutely dependent upon circumstances, a present abundance of water makes it flourish, and a drought destroys it at once. Is this my case? Do I only serve God when I am in good company, or when religion is profitable and respectable? Do I love the Lord only when temporal comforts are received from His hands? If so I am a base hypocrite, and like the withering rush, I shall perish when death deprives me of outward joys. But can I honestly assert that when bodily comforts have been few, and my surroundings have been rather adverse to grace than at all helpful to it, I have still held fast my integrity? then have I hope that there is genuine vital godliness in me. The rush cannot grow without mire, but plants of the Lord's right hand planting can and do flourish even in the year of drought. A godly man often grows best when his worldly circumstances decay. He who follows Christ for his bag is a Judas; they who follow for loaves and fishes are children of the devil; but they who attend Him out of love to Himself are His own beloved ones. Lord, let me find my life in *Thee*, and not in the mire of this world's favour or gain.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

WHEN the Lord in mercy passed by and saw us in our blood, He first of all said, "Live"; and this He did *first*, because life is one of the absolutely essential things in spiritual matters, and until it be bestowed we are incapable of partaking in the things of the kingdom. Now the life which grace confers upon the saints at the moment of their quickening is none other than the life of Christ, which, like the sap from the stem, runs into us, the branches, and establishes a living connection between our souls and Jesus. Faith is the grace which perceives this union, having proceeded from it as its firstfruit. It is the neck which joins the body of the Church to its all-glorious Head.

"Oh Faith! thou bond of union with the Lord,
Is not this office thine? and thy fit name,
In the economy of gospel types,
And symbols apposite—the Church's neck;
Identifying her in will and work
With Him ascended?"

Faith lays hold upon the Lord Jesus with a firm and determined grasp. She knows His excellence and worth, and no temptation can induce her to repose her trust elsewhere; and Christ Jesus is so delighted with this heavenly grace, that He never ceases to strengthen and sustain her by the loving embrace and all-sufficient support of His eternal arms. Here, then, is established a living, sensible, and delightful union which casts forth streams of love, confidence, sympathy, complacency, and joy, whereof both the bride and bridegroom love to drink. When the soul can evidently perceive this oneness between itself and Christ, the pulse may be felt as beating for both, and the one blood as flowing through the veins of each. Then is the heart as near heaven as it can be on earth, and is prepared for the enjoyment of the most sublime and spiritual kind of fellowship.

*Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen,
and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying,
Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.
1 Samuel 7:12*

THE word “hitherto” seems like a hand pointing in the direction of the *past*. Twenty years or seventy, and yet, “hitherto the Lord hath helped!” Through poverty, through wealth, through sickness, through health, at home, abroad, on the land, on the sea, in honour, in dishonour, in perplexity, in joy, in trial, in triumph, in prayer, in temptation, “hitherto hath the Lord helped us!” We delight to look down a long avenue of trees. It is delightful to gaze from end to end of the long vista, a sort of verdant temple, with its branching pillars and its arches of leaves; even so look down the long aisles of your years, at the green boughs of mercy overhead, and the strong pillars of lovingkindness and faithfulness which bear up your joys. Are there no birds in yonder branches singing? Surely there must be many, and they all sing of mercy received “hitherto.”

But the word also points *forward*. For when a man gets up to a certain mark and writes “hitherto,” he is not yet at the end, there is still a distance to be traversed. More trials, more joys; more temptations, more triumphs; more prayers, more answers; more toils, more strength; more fights, more victories; and then come sickness, old age, disease, death. Is it over now? No! there is more yet—awakening in Jesu’s likeness, thrones, harps, songs, psalms, white raiment, the face of Jesus, the society of saints, the glory of God, the fulness of eternity, the infinity of bliss. O be of good courage, believer, and with grateful confidence raise thy “Ebenezer,” for—

He who hath helped thee hitherto
Will help thee all thy journey through.

When read in heaven’s light how glorious and marvellous a prospect will thy “hitherto” unfold to thy grateful eye!

*Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof:
and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

Ecclesiastes 7:8

LOOK at David's Lord and Master; see His beginning. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Would you see the end? He sits at His Father's right hand, expecting until His enemies be made his footstool. "As He is, so are we also in this world." You must bear the cross, or you shall never wear the crown; you must wade through the mire, or you shall never walk the golden pavement. Cheer up, then, poor Christian. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." See that creeping worm, how contemptible its appearance! It is the beginning of a thing. Mark that insect with gorgeous wings, playing in the sunbeams, sipping at the flower bells, full of happiness and life; that is the end thereof. That caterpillar is yourself, until you are wrapped up in the chrysalis of death; but when Christ shall appear you shall be like Him, for you shall see Him as He is. Be content to be like Him, a worm and no man, that like Him you may be satisfied when you wake up in His likeness. That rough-looking diamond is put upon the wheel of the lapidary. He cuts it on all sides. It loses much—much that seemed costly to itself. The king is crowned; the diadem is put upon the monarch's head with trumpet's joyful sound. A glittering ray flashes from that coronet, and it beams from that very diamond which was just now so sorely vexed by the lapidary. You may venture to compare yourself to such a diamond, for you are one of God's people; and this is the time of the cutting process. Let faith and patience have their perfect work, for in the day when the crown shall be set upon the head of the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, one ray of glory shall stream from you. "They shall be Mine," saith the Lord, "in the day when I make up My jewels." "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

John 7:37

P*ATIENCE* had her perfect work in the Lord Jesus, and until the last day of the feast He pleaded with the Jews, even as on this last day of the year He pleads with us, and waits to be gracious to us. Admirable indeed is the longsuffering of the Saviour in bearing with some of us year after year, notwithstanding our provocations, rebellions, and resistance of His Holy Spirit. Wonder of wonders that we are still in the land of mercy!

Pity expressed herself most plainly, for Jesus *cried*, which implies not only the loudness of His voice, but the tenderness of His tones. He entreats us to be reconciled. "We pray you," says the Apostle, "as though God did *beseech* you by us." What earnest, pathetic terms are these! How deep must be the love which makes the Lord weep over sinners, and like a mother woo His children to His bosom! Surely at the call of such a cry our willing hearts will come.

Provision is made most plenteously; all is provided that man can need to quench his soul's thirst. To his conscience the atonement brings peace; to his understanding the gospel brings the richest instruction; to his heart the person of Jesus is the noblest object of affection; to the whole man the truth as it is in Jesus supplies the purest nutriment. Thirst is terrible, but Jesus can remove it. Though the soul were utterly famished, Jesus could restore it.

Proclamation is made most freely, that every thirsty one is welcome. No other distinction is made but that of thirst. Whether it be the thirst of avarice, ambition, pleasure, knowledge, or rest, he who suffers from it is invited. The thirst may be bad in itself, and be no sign of grace, but rather a mark of inordinate sin longing to be gratified with deeper draughts of lust; but it is not goodness in the creature which brings him the invitation, the Lord Jesus sends it freely, and without respect of persons.

Personality is declared most fully. The sinner must come to Jesus, not to works, ordinances, or doctrines, but to a personal Redeemer, who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree. The bleeding, dying, rising Saviour, is the only star of hope to a sinner. Oh for grace to come now and drink, ere the sun sets upon the year's last day!

No waiting or preparation is so much as hinted at. Drinking represents a reception for which no fitness is required. A fool, a thief, a harlot can drink; and so sinfulness of character is no bar to the invitation to believe in Jesus. We want no golden cup, no bejewelled chalice, in which to convey the water to the thirsty; the mouth of poverty is welcome to stoop down and quaff the flowing flood. Blistered, leprous, filthy lips may touch the stream of divine love; they cannot pollute it, but shall themselves be purified. Jesus is the fount of hope. Dear reader, hear the dear Redeemer's loving voice as He cries to each of us,

“IF ANY MAN THIRST,
LET HIM
COME UNTO ME
AND DRINK.”

Scripture Memory Programme 2013

Wisdom for Daily Living

The Book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom for daily living. The 52 proverbs in this booklet have been carefully selected to equip you with divine wisdom to know what is good and what is evil, and with the right attitudes that will enable you to live in conformity to God's will.

Memorise them and meditate on them prayerfully to be spiritually enriched!

January 6 – True Wisdom

Proverbs 9:10 – The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

January 13 – Trusting God

Proverbs 3:5 – Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

January 20 – Guidance from God

Proverbs 3:6 – In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.

January 27 – True Wisdom

Proverbs 3:7 – Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

February 3 – Security in God

Proverbs 18:10 – The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

February 10 – Contentment

Proverbs 15:16 – Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

February 17 – Contentment

Proverbs 30:8 – Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.

February 24 – Hypocrisy in Worship

Proverbs 15:8 – The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

March 3 – Right Motives

Proverbs 21:2 – Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

March 10 – Discernment

Proverbs 14:15 – The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

March 17 – Fear of Man

Proverbs 29:25 – The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

March 24 – True Value

Proverbs 13:7 – There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.

March 31 – Hatred and Love

Proverbs 10:12 – Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.

April 7 – Forgiveness

Proverbs 17:9 – He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.

April 14 – Slothfulness

Proverbs 13:4 – The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

April 21 – Diligence

Proverbs 30:25 – The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.

April 28 – Being Frugal

Proverbs 21:20 – There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.

May 5 – Love for Pleasure

Proverbs 21:17 – He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

May 12 – The Godly Woman

Proverbs 31:30 – Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

May 19 – Addiction to Wine

Proverbs 20:1 – Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

May 26 – Exercising Moderation

Proverbs 25:16 – Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.

June 2 – Choice of Friends

Proverbs 13:20 – He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

June 9 – True Friendship

Proverbs 17:17 – A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

June 16 – Parenting

Proverbs 22:6 – Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

June 23 – Faithfulness

Proverbs 11:13 – A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

June 30 – Folly of Pride

Proverbs 16:18 – Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

July 7 – Being Considerate

Proverbs 25:17 – Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.

July 14 – Correction

Proverbs 27:6 – Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

July 21 – Willingness to Learn

Proverbs 13:18 – Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

July 28 – Counsel

Proverbs 27:9 – Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

August 4 – God's Judgment

Proverbs 14:34 – Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

August 11 – Honesty

Proverbs 12:22 – Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.

August 18 – Honesty

Proverbs 11:1 – A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.

August 25 – Habitual Borrowing

Proverbs 22:7 – The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

September 1 – Character Moulding

Proverbs 27:17 – Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

September 8 – Peace with Man

Proverbs 16:7 – When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

September 15 – Love Your Enemy

Proverbs 24:17 – Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.

September 22 – Doing Good

Proverbs 3:27 – Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

September 29 – Respect for Parents

Proverbs 23:22 – Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.

October 6 – Boasting

Proverbs 27:2 – Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

October 13 – Guarding the Heart

Proverbs 4:23 – Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

October 20 – Integrity

Proverbs 22:1 – A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.

October 27 – Counsel

Proverbs 11:14 – Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

November 3 – Handling Conflicts

Proverbs 15:1 – A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

November 10 – Confession

Proverbs 28:13 – He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

November 17 – Effects of Speech

Proverbs 12:18 – There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.

November 24 – Restraint in Speech

Proverbs 10:19 – In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.

December 1 – Self-Control

Proverbs 16:32 – He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

December 8 – Warning against Evil

Proverbs 4:14 – Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

December 15 – Care for the Poor

Proverbs 19:17 – He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.

December 22 – Generosity

Proverbs 11:25 – The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

December 29 – Love Wisdom

Proverbs 23:23 – Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.