

AN EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

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Hebrews 9 - Hebrews 12:2

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Hebrews 9:1-5

Chapter 39 - The Typical Tabernacle

The principal design of the apostle in this epistle was to prove and make manifest that the "old covenant" which Jehovah made with Israel at Sinai, with all the ordinances of worship and the privileges connected therewith, had been Divinely annulled. This involved a complete change in the church-state of the Hebrews, but so far from this being a thing to deplore, it was to their unspeakable advantage. A "new covenant" had been inaugurated, and the blessings connected with it so far excelled those which had belonged to the old dispensation, that nothing but blind prejudice and perverse unbelief could refuse the true light which now shone, and prefer in its stead the dark shadows of a previous night. God never asks anybody to give up any thing without proffering something far better in return; and they who despise His offer are the losers. But prejudice is strong, and never harder to overcome than in connection with religious customs. Therefore does the Spirit labor so patiently in His argument throughout these chapters.

The chief obstacle in the way of the Hebrews' faith was their failure to perceive that every thing connected with the ceremonial law—the tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices—was typical in its significance and value. Because it was typical, it was only preparatory and transient, for once the Antitype materialized its purpose was served. The shadows were no longer needed when the Substance was manifested. The scaffolding is dispensed with, taken away, as soon as the finished building appears. The toys of the nursery become obsolete when manhood is reached. Everything is beautiful in its proper season. Heavy garments are needed when the cold of winter is upon us, but they would be troublesome in summer's sunshine. Once we recognize that God Himself has acted on this principle in His dispensational dealings with His people, much becomes plain which otherwise would be quite obscure.

The apostle had closed the 8th chapter by pointing out, "Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." In

those words the Spirit had intimated the unescapable inference which must be drawn from the oracle given through Jeremiah. He had predicted a "new covenant," which received its fulfillment in the establishing of Christianity. The ushering in of the new order of Divine worship necessarily denoted that the previous economy was "old," and if so, its end must be nigh. The force of Hebrews 8:13 is as follows: "In that He says a 'new': God would not have done so unless He had made the first "old." The "He hath made the first old" has an active significance and denotes an authoritative act of God upon the old economy, whereby the calling of the other "new" was the sign and evidence. God did not call the Christian dispensation "another covenant," or a "second covenant," but a "new" one, thereby declaring that the Judaic covenant was obsolete.

The connecting link between the closing verses of chapter 8 and the opening verses of Hebrews chapter 9 may perhaps be set forth thus: although the old covenant or Mosaic economy was "ready to vanish away," nevertheless, it yields, even for Christians, important and valuable teachings. It is full of most blessed typical import, the record of which has been preserved both for the glory of its Author and the edification and joy of His saints. Wonderful indeed were the pictorial fore-shadowings which the Lord gave in the days of Israel's kindergarten. The importance of them was more than hinted at by God when, though He took but six days to make heaven and earth, He spent no less than forty days when instructing Moses concerning the making of the tabernacle. That clearly denoted that the work of redemptive grace, which was prefigured in Jehovah's earthly dwelling place, was far more glorious than the work of creation. Thereby are we taught to look away from the things which are seen, and fix our minds and affections upon that sphere where the Son of God reigns in light and love.

"The general design of this chapter is the same as the two preceding, to show that Christ as High Priest is superior to the Jewish high priest. This the apostle had already shown to be true in regard to His rank, and to the dispensation of which He was the Mediator. He proceeds now to show that this was also true in reference to the efficacy of the sacrifice which He made: and in order to do this, he gives an account of the ancient Jewish sacrifices, and compares them with that made by the Redeemer. The essential point is, that the former dispensation was mere shadow, type, or

figure, and that the latter was real and efficacious."—(A. Barnes).

"Then verily the first had also ordinances of the Divine service, and a worldly sanctuary" (verse 1). Having in the former chapter given further proof of the excellency of Christ's sacerdotal office, by describing the superior covenant that was ratified thereby, the apostle now prepares the way to set forth the execution of that office, following the same method of procedure in so doing. Just as he had drawn a comparison between Aaron and Christ, so he now sets the ministrations of the one over against the Other, and this in order to prove that that of Christ's was most certainly to be preferred. He first approaches the execution of the Levitical priests' office by mentioning several rites and types which appertained thereto.

"Then verily the first had also ordinances of Divine service, and a worldly sanctuary." The apostle here begins the comparison which he draws between the old covenant and the new with respect to the services and sacrifices whereby the one and the other was established and confirmed. In so doing he is still dealing with what was to all pious Israelites a most tender consideration. It was in the services and sacrifices which belonged to the priestly office in the tabernacle that they had been taught to place all their confidence for reconciliation with God. If the apostle's previous contention respecting the abolition of the legal priesthood was granted, then it necessarily followed that the sanctuary in which they served and all the offerings which Moses had so solemnly appointed, became useless too. It calls for our closest attention and deepest admiration to observe how the Spirit led the apostle to approach an issue so startling and momentous.

First, he is so far from denying that the ritual of Judaism was of human invention, that he declares, "verily (of truth) the first covenant had also ordinances of Divine service." Thus he follows the same method employed in the preceding chapters. In drawing his comparisons between Israel's prophets and Christ, the angels and Christ, Moses and Christ, Joshua and Christ, Aaron and Christ, he had said nothing whatever in disparagement of the inferior. So far from reviling the first member in each comparison, he had dwelt upon that which was in its favor: the more they could be legitimately magnified, the greater the glory accruing to Christ when it was proved how far He excelled them. So here: the apostle granted the

principal point which an objector would make—why should the first covenant be annulled if God Himself had made it? Before giving answer to this (seemingly) most difficult question, he allows and affirms that the service of Judaism was of Divine institution. Thus, in the earliest ages of human history God had graciously appointed means for His people to use.

The expression "ordinances of divine service" calls for a word or two by way of explanation. The word which is here rendered "ordinances" (margin "ceremonies") signifies rites, statutes, institutions. They were the appointments of God, which He alone had the right to prescribe, and which His people were under solemn bonds of observing, and that without any alteration or deviation. These "ordinances" were of "divine service" which is a single word in the original. In its verbal form it is found in Hebrews 8:5, "to serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things." In the New Testament it is always found in connection with religious or divine service: in Acts 24:14, Philippians 3:3 it is translated "worship." It signifies to serve in godly fear or trembling, thus implying an holy awe and reverence for the One served—cf. Hebrews 12:28. Thus, the complete clause means that under the Mosaic economy God gave His people authoritative enactments to direct their worship of Him. This law of worship was a hedge which Jehovah placed around Israel to keep them from the abominations of the heathen. It was concerning this very thing that God had so many controversies with His people under the old covenant.

Care needs to be duly paid to the tense which the apostle here used: he said not "verily the first covenant has also ordinances, of divine service," but "had". He is obviously referring to the past. The Mosaic economy had those ordinances from the time God covenanted with Israel at Sinai. But that covenant was no longer in force; it had been Divinely annulled. The "verily the first covenant had also ordinances of Divine worship," clearly intimates that the new covenant too has Divine "ordinances." We press this because there are some who now affirm that even Christian baptism and the Lord's supper are "Jewish" ceremonies, which belong not to this present dispensation. But this error is sufficiently refuted by this word "also"—found in the very epistle which was written to prove that Judaism has given place to Christianity!

"And a worldly sanctuary." The reference is (as the next

verse plainly shows) to the Tabernacle, which Moses made in all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount. Many have been sorely puzzled as to why the Holy Spirit should designate the holy sanctuary of Jehovah a "worldly" one. Yet this adjective should not present any difficulty. It is not used invidiously, still less as denoting anything which is evil. "Worldly" is not here opposed to "spiritual," but as that which belongs to the earth rather than to the heavens. Thus the force of "worldly" here emphasizes the fact that the Mosaic economy was but a transient one, and not eternal. The tabernacle was made here in this world, out of perishing materials found in the world, and was but a portable tent, which might at pleasure be taken down and set up again; while the efficacy of its services extended only unto worldly things, and procured not that which was vital and eternal. Note how in Hebrews 9:24 the "holy places made with hands" are set in antithesis from "heaven itself."

We cannot but admire the wisdom given to the apostle in handling a matter so delicate and difficult. While his object was to show the immeasurable superiority of that which has been brought in by Christ over that which Judaism had enjoyed, at the same time he would own that which was of God in it. Thus, on the one hand, he acknowledges the service of the Levitical priests as "divine," yet, to pave the way for his further proof that Christ is a Minister of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1, 2), he points out that the tabernacle of Judaism was but a "worldly" one. "The antithesis to worldly is heavenly, uncreated, eternal. Thus in the epistle to the Galatians, the apostle, speaking of the legal parenthetical dispensation, says we were then in bondage under the 'elements of the world' (Heb. 4:3); and in the epistle to the Colossians he contrasts with the 'rudiments of the world' (Heb. 2:20) the heavenly position of the believer who has died with Christ, and 'is no longer living in the world,' but seeking the things above" (Adolph Saphir).

"For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, And the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary" (verse 2). "The subject spoken of is the tabernacle: that which is in general affirmed of it is that it was 'made.' There is a distribution of it into two parts in this and the following verse. These parts are described and distinguished by, first, their names; second, their situation with respect unto one another; third, their contents or sacred utensils. The one is described in this verse, by its situation: it

was the 'first,' that which was first entered into; then by its utensils, which were three; then by its name; it was called the sanctuary" (John Owen).

"For there was a tabernacle made." A full description of it is to be found in the book of Exodus. The "tent" proper was thirty cubits, or forty-five feet in length, ten cubits, or fifteen feet in breadth, and the same in height. In shape it formed an oblong square. It was divided by a veil into two parts of unequal size. This continued to form God's house of worship until the days of Solomon, when it was replaced by the more permanent and magnificent temple. It is pertinent to ask at this point, Why should the Holy Spirit here refer to the "tabernacle" rather than to the temple, which was still standing at the time the apostle was writing? The word "tabernacle" is found ten times in this epistle, but the "temple" is not mentioned once. This is the more remarkable because Paul, more than any of the apostles, emphasized the resurrection of Christ, and the temple particularly foreshadowed Him in His resurrection and eternal glory; whereas the tabernacle principally prefigured Christ in His humiliation and lowliness. Yet the difficulty is easily solved: the temple was not erected till after Israel were thoroughly settled in their inheritance, and the Holy Spirit is here addressing a people who were yet in the wilderness!

The Holy Spirit now makes a bare allusion to the holy vessels which occupied the two compartments of the tabernacle. But what rule has been given us to guide in and fix with certainty the interpretation of the mystical signification of these things? Certainly God has not left His people to the worthless devisings of their own imaginations. No, in this very epistle, He has graciously informed us that the tabernacle, and all contained in it, were typical of Christ, yet not as He may be considered absolutely, but as the Church is in mystical union with Him, for throughout Hebrews He is viewed in the discharge of His mediatory office. Thus the tabernacle, its holy vessels and services, supplied a representation of the person, work, offices and glories of Christ as the Head of His people. That it did so is clear from Hebrews 8:2—see our comments thereon. The "true tabernacle" there mentioned (our Lord's humanity) is not opposed to what is false and erroneous (the shrines of the heathen), but to the tabernacle of Moses, which was but figurative and transitory. In the Lord Jesus we have the substance of what Israel had only the

shadow.

"For there was a tabernacle made: the first (compartment) wherein was the candlestick." It is to be noted that no mention is here made of the outer court. In this omission, as in so many others, the anointed eye may clearly discern the absolute control of the Spirit over the sacred writers, moving and guiding them in every detail. In our articles upon Exodus (1926, etc.) we have attempted a much fuller exposition than can here be given. Suffice it now to say that everything connected with the outer court was fulfilled by Christ in the days of His flesh. The very fact that it was the "outer" court, accessible to all the people and unroofed, at once denotes to us Christ here in the world, openly manifested before men. Its brazen altar spoke of the cross, where God publicly dealt with the sins of His people. Its fine linen hangings spoke of Christ meeting the claims of God's righteousness and holiness. Its sixty pillars tell of the strength and power of Christ, "mighty to save." Its laver foreshadowed Christ cleansing His Church with the washing of water by the Word (John 13).

Now as the outer court viewed Christ on earth, so the holy places pointed to Him in heaven. The holy place was a chamber which was entered by none save the priestly family, where those favored servants of Jehovah ministered before Him. It was therefore the place of communion. In perfect keeping with this, each of the three vessels that stood therein spoke of fellowship. The lampstand foreshadowed Christ as the power for fellowship, as supplying the light necessary to it. The table with its twelve loaves, prefigured Christ as the substance of our fellowship, the One on whom we feast. The incense altar typified Christ as the maintainer of fellowship, by His intercession securing our continued acceptance before the Father. The reason why the "incense altar" is not mentioned here in Hebrews 9 will be taken up when we come to verse 4.

"For there was a tabernacle made: the first (compartment) wherein was the candlestick," or better, "lampstand." There was no window in the tabernacle, for the light of nature cannot reveal spiritual things. It was therefore illuminated from this holy vessel, which was placed on the south side, near the veil which concealed the holy of holies. A full description of it is given in Exodus 25:31-36. It was made of beaten gold, all of one piece, with all its lamps

and ornamentations, so that it was without either joints or screws. Pure olive oil was provided for it.

The very fact that the lampstand stood in the holy place, at once shows that it is not Christ as "the Light of the world" which is typified. It is strange that many of the commentators have erred here. The words of Christ on this point are clear enough: "as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5 and cf. Hebrews 12:35, 36): only then was He manifested here as such. But men loved darkness rather than light. They rejected the Light, and so far as they were concerned, extinguished it. Since Christ was put to death by wicked hands, the world has never again gazed on the Light. He is now hidden from their eyes. But He who was slain by the world, rose again, and then ascended on high; it is there in the Holy Place in God's presence, that the Light now dwells. And while there—O marvelous privilege—the saints have access to Him.

Black shadows rest upon the world which has cast out the Light of Life: "the way of the wicked is as darkness" (Prov. 4:19). It is now night-time, for the "Dayspring from on high" is absent. The lampstand tells of the gracious provision which God has made for His own beloved people during the interval of darkness, ere the Sun of righteousness shall rise once more, and usher in for this earth that morning without clouds. Its seven branches and lamps constantly fed by oil, represented the fullness of light that is in Christ Jesus, and which by Him is communicated to His whole Church. The "oil" was poured into its lamps and then shed forth light from them. Such was and is the economical relation of the Spirit unto the Mediator. First, Christ was "anointed" with the Spirit "above His fellows" (Ps. 45:7 and cf. John 3:34), and then He sent forth the Spirit (Acts 2:33). Objectively the Spirit conveys light to us through the Word; subjectively, by inward and supernatural illumination.

"And the table and shewbread" (verse 2). Though intimately connected, yet these two objects may be distinguished in their typical significance. The natural relation of the one to the other, helps us to perceive their spiritual meaning: the bread was placed upon and thus was supported by the table. The "table" speaks of communion. A beautiful picture of this is found in 2 Samuel 9. There David asks, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (verse 1). A lovely illustration was this of the wondrous grace of God, showing

kindness to those who belong to the house of His enemy, and that for the sake of His Beloved. There was one, even Mephibosheth, lame on his feet; him David "sent and fetched" unto himself. And then, to show he is fully reconciled to this grandson of his foe, David said, "but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread always at my table" (verse 10)—evidencing that he had been brought into the place of most intimate fellowship. 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21 also shows the spiritual significance of the "table."

The "shewbread," or twelve loaves on the table, also spoke of Christ. "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven" (John 6:32). The word "shewbread" is literally "bread of faces," faces being put by a figure for presence—pointing to the Divine presence in which the bread stood; "shewbread before Me always" (Ex. 25:30). The twelve loaves, like the twelve precious stones in the high priest's breastplate, pictured the twelve tribes of Israel being represented before God. Thus, in type, it was the Lord Jesus identifying Himself with His covenant people.

"And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all" (verse 3). The first veil was the "hanging" over the entrance into the tabernacle, shutting off from view what was inside from those who were in the outer court. It is described in Exodus 26:36, 37. The second veil, described in Exodus 26:31-33 and explained in Hebrews 10:20, was a heavy curtain which concealed the contents of the holy of holies from those in the holy place. The Levitical family ministered in the holy place, but none save the holiest of all, and he only one day in the year. Three things have been mentioned as occupying a place in the first tabernacle; seven objects are now mentioned in connection with the holiest of all.

"Which had the golden censer" (verse 4). First, we would note the minute accuracy of the wording here. In verse 2 it was said "Wherein was the candlestick," etc., for the objects there mentioned belonged properly to the first compartment. But here it is, "which had the golden censer." Why? Because this utensil did not form part of the furniture of the holy of holies. To what then is the reference? Plainly to what is recorded in Leviticus 16:12, 13, "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the (brazen) altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-

seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not."

For three hundred and fifty-nine days in the year Aaron ministered at the golden or incense altar, which stood in the holy place; but on the remaining day, the annual "Day of Atonement," he did not. Instead, he used the "golden censer" of incense, passing with it within the veil. It is this which explains why there is no mention of the "golden altar" in verse 2, for the Holy Spirit is here treating (see the later verses) of the Judaic ritual on the Day of Atonement, and the fulfillment of the type by the Lord Jesus. That which was represented by the "golden censer" was the acceptability of Christ's person to God and the efficacy of His intercession. The beautiful type of Leviticus 16:12, 13 denotes that, in consequence of the satisfaction which Christ made unto God, completed at the cross, His mediatory intercession is a sweet savor unto the Father, and effective unto the salvation of His Church. The fact that the smoke of this perfume covered the ark and the mercy-seat, wherein was the law, and over which the symbol of the Divine presence abode, denoted that Christ has magnified the law, met its every requirement, and is the end of the law for righteousness unto everybody that believeth.

"And the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant" (verse 4). The ark, with the mercy-seat which formed its lid or cover, was the most glorious and mysterious vessel of the tabernacle. It was the first thing made (Ex. 25:10, 11), yea, the whole sanctuary was built for no other end but to be, as it were, a house and habitation for the ark (Ex. 26:33). The ark was the outstanding symbol that God Himself was present among His people and that His covenant-blessing was resting upon them. It was the coffer in which the tables of the law were preserved. Its pre-eminence above all the other vessels was shown in the days of Solomon, for the ark alone was transferred from the tabernacle to the temple.

The ark was an outstanding figure of the incarnate Son of God. The wood of which it was made, typified His sinless humanity. "Shittim" wood never rotted, and the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament renders it "incorruptible wood." The wood was overlaid, within and without, with gold, prefiguring Christ's Divine glory. The two materials of which the ark was made symbolized the

union of the two natures in the God-man—"God manifest in flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). The ark formed God's throne in Israel: "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim" (Ps. 80:1). Christ is the only One who perfectly enthroned God, honoring His government in all things. Each of the seven names given to the ark in the Old Testament sets forth some excellency in the person of Christ. Everything connected with its most remarkable history, as in Numbers 10:33, 14:44, Joshua 3:5-17, 6:4-20, etc., received its antitypical fulfillment in the God-man.

"Wherein was the golden pot that had manna." Some have imagined a contradiction between this statement and what is said in 1 Kings 8:9, "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone." But there is no conflict between the two passages, for they are not treating of the same point in time. Hebrews 9:4 is speaking of what was in the ark during the days when it was lodged in the tabernacle, whereas 1 Kings 8:9 tells of what comprised its contents after it came to rest in the temple. It is important to note this distinction, for it supplies the key to the spiritual interpretation of our verse: Hebrews 9:4 makes known God's provisions in Christ for His people while they are journeying through the wilderness. Thus the "manna" was Israel's food from Egypt to Canaan: type of Christ as the heavenly sustenance for our souls. The preservation of the manna in the golden pot, speaks of Christ in glory at God's right hand.

"And Aaron's rod that budded." The reference is to what is recorded in Numbers 17. In the preceding chapter we read of a revolt against Moses and Aaron, occasioned by jealousy at the authority which God had delegated to His two servants. The revolt of Korah and his company was visited by summary judgment from on high, and was followed by a manifest vindication of Aaron. The form that vindication took is most instructive. The Lord bade Moses take the twelve tribal rods, writing the name of Aaron on Levi's, laying them up before the ark, and affirming that the one which should be made to blossom would indicate which had been chosen of God to the priestly tribe. Next morning it was found that Aaron's rod had "brought forth buds, and blossomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." Afterwards God ordered Moses to place Aaron's rod before the ark "to be kept for a token against the rebels." The lifeless rod being made to blossom was a figure of God's vindication of His

rejected Son by raising Him from the dead. Thus it speaks of the resurrection-power of our great High Priest.

"And the tables of the covenant." The reference is to Deuteronomy 10:1-5. The preservation of the two tables of stone (on which were inscribed the ten commandments) in the ark, foreshadowed Christ magnifying the law and making it honorable (Isa. 42:21). The fulfillment of this type is stated in Psalm 40:7, 8, where we hear the Mediator saying, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me: I delight to do Thy will, O My God; Yea, Thy law is within My heart." The Representative of God's people was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4), and perfectly did He "fulfill" it (Matthew 5:17). Therefore is it written, "by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Thus may each believer exclaim, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24).

"And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat: of which we cannot now speak particularly" (verse 5). At either end of the mercy-seat was the form of a cherub with outstretched wings, meeting in the center, thus overshadowing and as it were protecting God's throne. That there is some profound significance connected with their figures is clear from the prominent place which they occupy in connection with the description of the mercy-seat given in Exodus 25:17-22: mention is there made of the cherubim, in either the singular or plural number, no less than seven times. The mention of them in Genesis 3:24 suggests that they are associated with the administration of God's judicial authority. In Revelation 4:6-8 (cf. Ezekiel 1:5-10) they are related to God's throne. Here in Hebrews 9 they are called the "cherubim of glory" because the Skekinah abode between them.

The mercy-seat, or better, "propitiatory," was the throne upon which the high priest placed the expiatory blood. It was not the place where propitiation was made—that was at the brazen altar—but where its abiding value was borne witness to before God. Romans 3:25 gives us the antitype: by the Gospel God now "sets forth" (Gal. 3:1) Christ as the One by whom He has been placated, as the One by whom His holy wrath against the sins of His people has been pacified, as the One by whom the righteous demands of His law were satisfied, as the One by whom every attribute of Deity was glorified. Christ Himself is God's resting-place in whom He now

meets poor sinners in all the fullness of His grace because of the propitiation made by Him on the cross.

The last clause of the verse is translated more literally in Bagster's Interlinear thus: "concerning which it is not now (the time) to speak in detail"—the "concerning which" is not to be restricted to that which is found here in verse 5, but takes in all that has been mentioned in verses 2-5. It would have led the apostle too far away from his subject of the high priest's service, to give an interpretation of the spiritual meaning of the tabernacle and everything in it. Nevertheless, he plainly intimates that every part of it had a specific significance as typical of the Lord Jesus and His ministry.

Hebrews 9:6-10

Chapter 40 - The Contrasted Priests

At the commencement of our last article we stated that, the principal design of the apostle in this epistle was to prove and make manifest that the "old covenant" which Jehovah made with Israel at Sinai, with all the ordinances of worship and privileges connected therewith had been Divinely annulled. This involved a complete change in the church-state of the Hebrews, but so far from this being a thing to be deplored, it was to their unspeakable advantage. In prosecuting this design, the Holy Spirit through Paul does, as it were, remove the veil from off the face of Moses. In 2 Corinthians 3:13 we read, "And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." These words direct attention to a profound spiritual truth which God (in keeping with His dispensational ways) caused to be mystically adumbrated or shadowed forth by a material and visible object.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7 the apostle had spoken of the brightness of Moses' face as a symbol of his ministry: the revelation which he received was a divine and glorious one. But because the truth communicated through Moses was in an obscure form (by types and emblems) he veiled himself. Paul, as a minister of the "new covenant" used "great plainness of speech" (2 Cor. 3:12), i.e., employing no "dark parables" or enigmatic prophecies, still less mysterious ceremonies. Moses wore a veil "that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished" (Heb. 3:7), i.e., to prevent their seeing the termination or fading away of the celestial brightness of his countenance. The mystical meaning of this was, God would not allow Israel to know at that time that the dispensation of the Levitical or legal ministry would ultimately cease. The publication of that fact was reserved for a much later date.

"But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old covenant;

which veil is done away in Christ" (2 Cor. 3:14). Yes, that "veil" which lay so heavily over the Mosaic types is now "done away in Christ," for He is that Antitype, the key which unlocks them, the sun which illuminates them. This, it is the great purpose of the Hebrews' epistle to demonstrate. Here is doctrinally removed the "veil" from off the Mosaic institutions. Here the Spirit makes known the nature and purpose of the "old covenant." Here He declares the significance and temporal efficacy of all institutions and ordinances of Israel's worship. Here He announces that the Levitical rites and ceremonies made a representation of heavenly things, but insists that those heavenly things could not themselves be introduced and established without the removal of what had adumbrated them. Here He shows that the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

Three things there were which constituted the glory of the old covenant, and which the Jews so rested in they refused the Gospel out of an adherence unto them: the priestly office; the tabernacle with all its furniture, wherein that office was exercised; the duties and worship of the priests in that tabernacle by sacrifices, especially those wherein there was a solemn expiation of the sins of the whole congregation. In reference to them, the apostle proves: first, that none of them could make perfect the state of the Church, nor really effect assured peace and confidence between God and the worshippers. Second, that they were but typical, ordained to represent that which was far more sublime and excellent than themselves. Third, that the Lord Jesus Christ, in His person and mediation, was really and substantially, all that they did but prefigure, and that He was and did what they could only direct unto an expectation of.

In Hebrews 7 the apostle has fully evidenced this in connection with the priestly office. In the 8th chapter he has done the same in general unto the tabernacle, confirming this by that great collateral argument taken from the nature and excellency of that covenant whereby the incarnate Son was the Surety and Mediator. Here in the 9th chapter, he takes up the services and sacrifices which belonged unto the priestly office in the tabernacle. It was in them that the Jews placed their greatest confidence for reconciliation with God, and concerning which they boasted of the excellency of their Church-state and worship. Because this was the chief point of difference between the Gospel-proclamation and those who

repudiated it, and because it was that whereon the whole doctrine of the justification of sinners before God did depend, the apostle enters into minute detail, declaring the nature, use and efficacy of the sacrifices of the law, and manifesting the nature, glory and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, whereby those others had been put an end to (condensed from John Owen).

"Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God" (verse 6). Having made a brief reference to the structure of the tabernacle in its two compartments, and the furniture belonging to each of them respectively, the apostle now turns to consider the uses for which they were designed unto in the service of God. First, he says "these things were thus ordained," or as the Revised Version more correctly renders it, "thus prepared," for the Greek word (translated "made" in verse 2), signifies to dispose and arrange. When the things mentioned in verses 2-5 had been made and duly ordered, they stood not for a magnificent show, but were designed for constant use in the service of God. Hereby we are taught that, for any service to be acceptable to God, it must be in strict accord with the pattern He has given us in His Word: carefully ponder (1 Chron. 15:12, 13). Everything was duly prepared for Divine service before that service was performed. So in public service or Divine worship today there must be fit persons who, under the Spirit, are to lead it "able ministers of the new testament" (2 Cor. 3:6); fit arrangements and order (1 Cor. 14:40), not mere human tradition (Matthew 15:9); a fit message unto edification (1 Cor. 14:26).

"The priests went always into the first tabernacle." They only were allowed in the holy place that were the sons of Aaron; but even these were suffered to penetrate no farther, being barred from entrance into the holy of holies. This was in contrast from the high priest who entered the inner sanctuary, yet only on one day in the year. The word "always" is translated "continually" in Hebrews 13:15. It signifies constantly, at all times as occasion did require. Christians have been made "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6), and they are bidden to "give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20); to "rejoice evermore" and "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:16, 17).

"Accomplishing the service of God." The translators have rightly added the last two words, for the "service" here is a Divine

one. "Accomplishing the service of God" means that they officiated in the ministry of the sacred ceremonies. The daily services of the priests were two: the dressing of the lamps of the candlestick: supplying them with the holy oil, trimming their wicks, etc.; this was done every evening and morning. Second, the service of the golden altar, whereon they burned incense every day, with fire taken from off the brazen altar, and this immediately after the offering of the evening and morning sacrifices. Whilst this service was being performed, the people without gave themselves unto prayer (Luke 1:10). Their weekly service was to change the shewbread on the table, which was done every Sabbath, in the morning. All of this was typical of the continual application of the benefits of the sacrifice and mediation of Christ unto His people here in the world.

The practical application to Christians now of what has just been before us, should be obvious. There ought to be family worship, both in the morning and in the evening. The replenishing of the oil in the lamps for continuous light, should find its counterpart in the daily looking to God for needed light from His Word, to direct our steps in the ordering of home and business life to His acceptance and praise. God has declared, "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:30). If God be not honored in the home by the family "altar," then we cannot count upon Him blessing our homes! The burning of the incense should receive its antitype in morning and evening praise and prayer unto God: owning Him as the Giver of every good and every perfect gift, thanking Him for spiritual and temporal mercies, casting all our care upon Him, pleading His promises, and trusting Him for a continuance of His favors. The Greek word here for "accomplishing" is a compound, which signifies to "completely finish"—rendered "perfecting" in 2 Corinthians 7:1—denoting their service was not done by halves. May we too serve God wholeheartedly.

"But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and the errors of the people" (verse 7). That to which the apostle here refers is the great anniversary- sacrifice of expiation, whose institution and solemnities are described at length in Leviticus 16. On the tenth day of the seventh month (which corresponds to our September) Israel's high priest, unattended and unassisted by his subordinates, entered

within the holy of holies, there to present propitiating sacrifices before Jehovah. Divested of his garments of "glory and beauty" (Ex. 28:2, etc.) and clad only in "the holy linen" (Lev. 16:4), he first entered the sacred precincts bearing a censer full of burning coals and his hands full of incense, which was to be placed upon the coals, so that a cloud of incense should cover the mercy-seat (Lev. 16:12, 13); which spoke of the fragrant excellency of Christ's person unto God, when He offered Himself an atoning sacrifice. Second, he took of the blood of the bullock, which had been killed for a sin-offering for himself and his house (Lev. 16:11), and sprinkled its blood upon and before the mercy-seat (Heb. 16:14). Third, he went out and killed the goat which was a sin-offering for the people, and did with its blood as he had with that of the bullocks (Heb. 16:15).

When the high priest's work within the veil had been completed, he came forth and laid both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confessed over him "all of the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat," which was then sent away "unto a land not inhabited" (Lev. 16:21, 22); all of which was typical of the Atonement made by the Lord Jesus, and of the plenary remission of sins through His blood. In the shedding of the victims' blood and offering it by fire on the altar, there was a representation made of the vicarious imputation of guilt to the sacrifice, and the expiation of it through death. In the carrying of the blood into the presence of Jehovah and the sprinkling of it upon His throne, witness was borne to His acceptance of the atonement which had been made. In the placing of the sins of Israel upon the live goat and its carrying of them away into a land uninhabited, there was a foreshadowing of the blessed truth that, as far as the east is from the west so far hath God removed the transgressions of His people from before Him.

"Into the second veil went the high priest alone: There shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement" (Lev. 16:17). This denoted that Christ alone was qualified to appear before God on behalf of His people: none other was fit to mediate for them. "Once every year," to foreshadow the fact that Christ entered heaven for His people once for all: Hebrews 9:12. "Which he offered for himself," for he too was a sinner, and therefore incompetent to make real, efficacious and acceptable atonement for others; thereby intimating that he must yet

give place to Another. "And for the errors of the people," which is to be interpreted in the light of the Old Testament expression "sins of ignorance" (Lev. 4:2; 5:15; Numbers 15:22-29), which are contrasted from deliberate or presumptuous sins (see Numbers 15:30, 31). Under the dispensation of law God graciously made provision for the infirmities of His people, granting them sacrifices for sins committed unwillingly and unwittingly. But for determined and open rebellion against His laws, no atoning sacrifice was available: see Hebrews 10:26.

The distinction pointed out above is the key to Psalm 51:16, "For Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it." There is no room for doubt that David knew full well the terrible character of the sins which he committed against Uriah and his wife. Later, when he was convicted of this, he realized that the law made no provision for forgiveness. What, then, did he do? Psalm 51:1-3 tells us: he laid hold on God Himself and said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (verse 17). It was faith, penitently, appropriating the mercy of God in Christ.

"The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing" (verse 8). The apostle now makes known the use which he intended to make of the description which had been given of the tabernacle and its furniture in verses 2-5: from the structure and order of its services he would prove the pre-eminency of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ above those which had belonged to the tabernacle. He points out that the Holy Spirit had provided instruction for Israel in the very disposal of their ancient institutions. Inasmuch as none but the high priest was permitted to pass within the veil, it was plainly intimated that under the Mosaic dispensation the people were barred from the very presence of God. Such a state of affairs could not be the ultimate and ideal, and therefore must be set aside before that which was perfect could be introduced.

"The Holy Spirit this signifying:" the reference is to the arrangements which obtained in the tabernacle, as specified in the preceding verses. Here we learn that the third person of the blessed Trinity was immediately concerned in the original instructions given to Israel. This intimates in a most striking way the perfect union, unison and cooperation of the persons of the Godhead in all that

They do. 2 Peter 1:21 declares that, "holy men of old spake, moved by the Holy Spirit," prominent among whom was Moses. In Exodus 35:1 we read, "Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These are the words which the Lord hath commanded"—the Holy Spirit moving Him to give an accurate record of all that he had heard from the Lord.

"The Holy Spirit this signifying," or making evident, that "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." How did He thus "signify" this fact? By the very framework of the tabernacle: that is, by allowing the people to go no farther than the outer court, and the priests themselves only into the first compartment. "For things in His wisdom were thus disposed, that there should be the first tabernacle whereinto the priests did enter every day, accomplishing the Divine services that God required. Howbeit in that tabernacle there were not the pledges of the gracious presence of God. It was not the especial residence of His glory. But the peculiar habitation of God was separated from it by a veil, and no person living might so much as look into it on pain of death. But yet, lest the church should apprehend, that indeed there was no approach, here, nor hereafter, for any person into the gracious presence of God; He ordained that once a year the high priest, and he alone, should enter into that holy place with blood. Hereby he plainly signified, that an entrance there was to be, and that with boldness, thereinto. For unto what end else did He allow and appoint, that once a year there should be an entrance into it by the high priest, in the name of and for the service of the church? But this entrance being only once a year, by the high priest only, and that with the blood of the covenant, which was always to be observed whilst that tabernacle continued, he did manifest that the access represented was not to be obtained during that season; for all believers in their own persons were utterly excluded from it" (John Owen).

"The way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." The apostle is not now speaking of the second compartment in the tabernacle (as in verse 3), but of that which was typified by it. "Now, in that most holy place, were all the signs and pledges of the gracious presence of God; the testimonies of our reconciliation by the blood of the atonement, and of our peace with Him thereby. Wherefore, to enter into these holies is nothing but to have an access with liberty, freedom and boldness, into the gracious presence of

God on the account of reconciliation and peace made with Him. This the apostle doth so plainly and positively declare in Hebrews 10:19-22 that I somewhat wonder so many learned expositors could utterly miss of his meaning in this place. The holies then is the gracious presence of God, whereunto believers draw nigh, in the confidence of the atonement made for them, and acceptance thereon: see Romans 5:1-3, Ephesians 2:14-18, Hebrews 4:14, 15' (John Owen).

But let us observe more closely this expression "the way into the holiest of all." This way is no other but the sacrifice of Christ, the true High Priest of the Church: as He Himself declared, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). Thus the ultimate reference here in "the holiest of all" is to Heaven itself, yet having a present and spiritual application unto access to and communion with God. The "way" into this is through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. Marvelously was this adumbrated here on earth at the moment of His death, for then the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51), thereby opening a way into the holy of holies.

But this access to God, or way into the holiest of all, "was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." It is to be very carefully noted that the apostle did not say that there was then no way "provided" or "made use of," but only that it was not, during Old Testament times, "made manifest." There was an entrance into the presence of God, both unto grace and glory, for His elect, from the days of Abel and onwards, but that "way" was not openly and publicly displayed. By virtue of the everlasting covenant (the agreement between the Father and the Son), and in view of Christ's satisfaction in the fullness of time, salvation was applied to saints then, and they were saved by faith as we are now, for the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. But the open manifestation of these things waited for the actual exhibition of Christ in the flesh, the full declaration of His person and mediation by the Gospel, and the introduction and establishment of all the privileges of Gospel worship.

"While as the first tabernacle was yet standing." The reference here is not to the first compartment or holy place, into which the priests entered and where they served, but is used synecdochially (a part put for the whole) for the entire legal system, which included the temples of Solomon and Zerubbabel. The "first

tabernacle" is here spoken of in contrast from the "true tabernacle" of Hebrews 8:2, namely, the humanity of Christ, which was the antitype and succeeded in the room of the type—cf. Revelation 13:6! The apostle is here treating of what had its standing before God whilst the "first covenant" and Aaronic priesthood remained valid. He cannot be here referring to the "first tabernacle" as a building, for that had become a thing of the past, long centuries before he wrote this epistle. Yet the temples that succeeded it had their standing on the basis of the old covenant. This had now been annulled, and with it the whole system of worship which had so long obtained in Judaism.

"Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience" (verse 9). Having briefly pointed out the emblematic significance of the two compartments of the tabernacle, the apostle now approaches his leading object in this paragraph, namely, to demonstrate that Christ had "obtained a more excellent ministry" than that which had belonged to the Levitical priesthood. This he does by giving a brief summary of the imperfections of the tabernacle and all its services, wherein the administration of the old covenant did consist. By calling attention to the defects of inadequacy of the Judaic system, the apostle adopted the most effective method of exposing the unreasonableness of the rejection of the more glorious Gospel by the majority of the Jews, and at the same time showed what folly and wickedness it would be for the believing Hebrews to return to that system.

The apostle's design in verses 9, 10 is to show that, notwithstanding the outward excellency and glory of the tabernacle-system (through Divine appointment), yet, in the will and wisdom of God, that system was only designed to continue for a season, and that the time of its expiation had now arrived. That the Levitical priesthood and their services were never intended by God to occupy a perpetual place in the worship of His church, was evident from the fact that they were utterly unable to effect for His saints that which He had purposed and promised. Not only did the presence of the veil, which excluded all save Aaron from the presence-chamber of Jehovah, intimate that the ideal state had not yet come; not only did the annual repetition of the great atoning-sacrifice indicate that, as

yet, the all-efficacious Sacrifice had not yet been offered; but all the gifts and sacrifices combined failed to "perfect as pertaining to the conscience." They were only "a figure for the time then present," an institution and provision of God "until the time of reformation."

"Which was a figure for the time then present." The "which was" includes the tabernacle in both its parts, with all its vessels and services. The Greek word for "figure" here is not the same as the one rendered "type" in Romans 5:14 and "examples" in 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11, but is the term commonly translated "parable," as in Matthew 13:3, 10 etc. It is used here for one thing representing another. It signifies "figurative instruction." By means of obscure mystical signs and symbols God taught the ancient church. The great mystery of our redemption by Christ was principally made known by a parable, which was addressed to the eyes rather than to the ears. That was the method which God was pleased to employ, the means He used under the law, of making known things to come. "Which was a figure," is the Holy Spirit's affirmation that the structure, fabric, furniture and rites of the tabernacle were all vested with a Divine and spiritual significance. That the truly regenerate among Israel were acquainted with this fact is illustrated by the prayer of David, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Ps. 119:18).

"Which was a figure for the time then present." The verb here is of the preter-imperfect tense, signifying a time that was then present, but is now past. The reference is to what had preceded the establishment of the new covenant, before the full Gospel revelation had been made. The figurative instruction which God gave to the early Church was not designed to be of permanent duration. Nevertheless, a sovereign God saw fit to continue that obscure and figurative representation of spiritual mysteries for no less than fifteen hundred years. His ways are ever the opposite of man's. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing" (Prov. 25:2)! But how thankful we should be that "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John 2:8). Still, let it not be overlooked that the revelation God made through the tabernacle was sufficient for the faith and obedience of Israel had it been diligently attended unto.

"In which were offered both gifts and sacrifices." The Greek word for "sacrifices" is derived from a verb which means to kill, thus the reference here is to those oblations which were slaughtered.

As distinguished from these, "gifts" were without life and sense, such as the meal-offering, oil, frankincense and salt which were mingled therewith (Lev. 2), the first-fruits, tithes, and all free-will offerings, which were presented by the priests. These were "offered" unto God, and that in the tabernacle, for there alone was it meet to offer them. So also was the "tabernacle" (Heb. 8:2) of Christ alone suited for its designed end. And what is the particular message this should have for the Christian heart? Surely to remind him of that word, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

"That could not make him perfect as pertaining to the conscience." These words are not to be understood as restricted to the officiating priest, rather do they look more directly to the person in whose stead he presented the offering to God. Here the apostle points out the imperfection of the whole tabernacle-order of things, and its impotency unto the great end that might be expected from it. To "perfect" a worshipper is to fit him, legally and experimentally, for communion with God, and for this there must be both justification and sanctification, and neither of these could the Levitical priests procure. They could neither remit guilt from before God, nor remove the stains of it from the soul. Where those are lacking, there can be no peace or assurance in the heart, and then the real spirit of worship is absent. As this (D.V.) comes before us again in Hebrews 10:2, we will not here further enlarge.

Ere passing on to the next verse, it may be enquired, If then the Levitical sacrifices failed at this vital point, why were they ever appointed by God at all? To this question two answers may be returned. First, those sacrifices availed to remove the temporal governmental consequence of Israel's sins; when rightly offered, they freed from political and external punishment, so that continuance in the land of Canaan was preserved; but they cancelled not the wages of sin, removed not the eternal punishment which was due unto every sin by the law. Second, they directed the faith of the regenerate forward to the perfect sacrifice of Christ (which the Levitical offerings typically represented), the virtue and value of which was available to faith's appropriation from the beginning.

"Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation" (verse

10). To convince those to whom he was writing that the Levitical ceremonies were incapable of perfecting the conscience, the apostle here demonstrates the truth of this by pointing out their inadequate nature and character. The ordinances of Judaism corresponded closely with the old covenant, which was made with man in the flesh: its sanctuary and furniture were material—things of sight and sense; its ministry was not spiritual, but had to do only with external rites; its ablutions effected nothing more than a ceremonial cleansing, and entirely failed to purify the heart, as faith does (Acts 15:9).

The "service" of the tabernacle-system "stood only in meats and drinks." This expression refers to the sacrifices and libations, which consisted of flesh and bread, oil and wine. "And divers washings": first, that of the priests themselves (Ex. 29:4, etc.), for whose use the "laver" was chiefly intended (Ex. 30:18, 31:9, etc.); second, of the various parts of the burnt-offering sacrifice (Lev. 1:9, 13); third, of the people themselves when they had contracted defilement (Lev. 15:8,16, etc.). "And carnal ordinances" which refers, most probably, to the whole system of laws pertaining to diet and manner of life. "Which stood only in," this is emphatic; the rites of Judaism were solely external and fleshly, there being nothing spiritual joined with them. Thus their insufficiency to procure spiritual and eternal blessings was evident: legal meats and drinks could not nourish the soul; ceremonial washings could not purify the heart.

"Imposed until the time of reformation." "The word for 'imposed' is properly 'lying on them,' that is, as a burden. There was a weight in all these legal rites and ceremonies, which is called a yoke, and too heavy for the people to bear (Acts 15:10). And if the imposition of them be principally intended, as we render the word 'impose,' it respects the bondage they were brought into by them. Men may have a weight lying on them, and yet not be brought into bondage thereby. But these things were so 'imposed' on them, as that they might feel their weight and groan under the burden of it. Of this bondage the apostle treats at large in the epistle to the Galatians. And it was impossible that those things should perfect a church-state, which in themselves were such a burden, and effective of such a bondage" (John Owen).

The institutions of the Levitical service possessed a general

character of externality and materiality: as verse 13 of our chapter says, they sanctified "to the purifying of the flesh," but they reached not the dire needs of the soul. Therefore they were not designed to continue forever, but for a determined and limited season, namely, "unto the time of reformation," which expression respected the appearing of the promised Messiah to inaugurate the new and better covenant: see Luke 1:68-74. "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law; to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5).

Hebrews 9:11-14

Chapter 41 - Eternal Redemption

In Hebrews 8:6 the apostle had affirmed, "He is the Mediator of a better covenant." Such a declaration would raise a number of important issues which are here anticipated and settled. Who is the High Priest of the new covenant? What is the tabernacle wherein He administered His office? What are the particular services He performed, answering to those which God appointed unto Aaron and His successors? Wherein do the services of the new High Priest excel those of the Levitical? These were pressing questions, and it was necessary for them to be Divinely answered, not only for the silencing of objectors, but that the faith of believing Jews might be established. Thus, in Hebrews 9:11, 12 we have the actual ministry of Christ declared, in verses 13,14 the proofs that it was "more excellent."

The 9th chapter of Hebrews contains a particular exemplification of this general proposition: Christ is the substance of the Levitical shadows. The general proposition was stated in Hebrews 8:1, 2: Christians have a High Priest who is a Minister of the true tabernacle. Here in chapter 9 confirmation is given of what was pointed out at the close of chapter 8, namely, that Christ's bringing in of the new covenant did abrogate the old. In exemplifying this fact mention is made in Hebrews 9:1-10 of sundry shadows of the law, in verse 11 and onwards it is shown that the antitypical accomplishment of them was in and by Jesus Christ. The contents of verses 1-10 may be reduced to two heads: ordinances of Divine service, and a worldly sanctuary in which they were observed. In verses 11-28 the Spirit magnifies the excellency of Christ's priesthood by showing that He brought in what the Aaronic rites were unable to secure (condensed from W. Gouge, 1650).

The contents of these verses which are now to be before us set forth the ministry of Christ as "the Mediator of the new covenant." They describe His initial work as the High Priest of His people. They set forth the inestimable value of His sacrifice, and

what it procured. They magnify His precious blood and the character of that redemption which was purchased thereby. Each verse calls for a separate article, and every clause in them demands our closest and most reverent attention. May the Spirit of God deign to open unto us something of their blessed contents, and apply them in power to our hearts. We purposely cut down our introductory comments that more space may be reserved for the exposition.

"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood, He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (verses 11, 12). "These words naturally call attention to two things: The official character with which our Lord is invested, and the ministry which He has performed in that official character. His official character: He is 'come an high priest of good things to come.' His ministry in that official character: 'He has obtained eternal redemption for His people,'" (John Brown).

"But Christ being come an High Priest." The opening word emphasizes a contrast: the legal high priest "could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience" (verse 9): "But Christ"—could. The title here given the Savior deserves particular notice. He is referred to in a considerable variety of ways in this epistle, and many different designations are there accorded Him. Each one is used with fine discrimination, and the reader loses much by failing to distinguish the force of "Jesus," "Christ," "Jesus Christ," "our Lord," "The Son," etc. Here (and also in Hebrews 3:6, 14; 5:5; 6:1; 9:14, 24, 28; 11:26) it is "Christ," the Messiah (John 1:41), His official designation, a term that means "The Anointed," see Psalm 2:2 and cf. Acts 4:26. Great emphasis is placed by the Holy Spirit upon this title: "the Christ" (John 20:31), "that Christ" (John 6:69), "very Christ" (Acts 9:22), "The Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26), "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:20).

"But Christ being come an High Priest." Under the name of the Messiah or Anointed One, He had been promised unto Israel for many centuries, and now the accomplishment had arrived. In a moment of doubt, His forerunner, in prison, sent unto Him asking, "Art Thou He that should come?" (Matthew 11:3). Upon the fulfillment of God's promise that He would send the Messiah, give a

perfect revelation of His will, and bring in "perfection," the faith of the Jewish church was built. And now God's Word was verified, the true Light shone. The awaited One had come: "in the character in which He was promised, having done all that it was promised He should do" (John Brown). Therefore does the Holy Spirit here give the Redeemer His official, and distinctively Hebrew, title. "But Christ being come" no doubt looks back, especially to Psalm 40:7.

"But Christ being come an High Priest." True, He came also as Prophet (Deut. 18:15, 18), and as King (Matthew 2:2), but here the Holy Spirit especially emphasizes the sacerdotal office of Christ, because it was in the exercise of that He offered Himself as a sacrifice unto God. The words which we are now considering begin a new division of this Epistle, though it is intimately related to what has gone before. In Hebrews 9:11–10:22 the Holy Spirit sets before us the antitype of Leviticus 16, which records the work of Israel's high priest on the annual day of atonement. There we behold Aaron officiating both outside the veil and within it. So the priestly functions of Christ fall into two great divisions, as they were performed on earth and as they are now continued in heaven. Before our great High Priest could enter the Holiest on high and there make intercession before God, He had first to make an atonement for the sins of those He represented, which was accomplished in His state of abjection here below, being consummated by His offering Himself a sacrifice unto God: 7:27, 8:3, 9:26.

A priest is one who officiates in the name of others, who approaches to God in order to make atonement for them by sacrifice. The design of his ministry is to render the Object of their worship propitious, to avert His wrath from men, to procure their restoration to His favor: see Leviticus 16. Thus, the work of the priest is mediatory. Since the fact of sin is a cardinal one in the case of man, the function of a mediating priest for man must be mainly expiatory and reconciling: Hebrews 8:3. It should serve as a most solemn warning unto all today that, while the Jews believed their Messiah would be both a prophet and king, they had no expectation of His also being priest, who should redeem sinners unto God. One who should go forth in the terror of His power, subjugating the nations and restoring the kingdom to Israel, appealed to their carnality; but for One to minister at the altar, employ His interest with God on behalf of transgressors, draw near to the Divine Majesty in their

name, and mediate peace between them and an offended Creator, seems to have had no place in their thoughts. Hence it is that the priesthood of Christ is given such a prominent place in this epistle to the Hebrews.

"But Christ being come an High Priest." As to the time of His investiture with this office, it was clearly co-incident to the general office of Mediator. At the same moment that God appointed His Son "Mediator," He was constituted the Prophet, the Priest, and the Potentate of His Church. Prospectively, that took place in the eternal councils of the blessed Trinity, when in the "everlasting covenant" the Father appointed the Son and the Son agreed to be the Mediator between Him and His people. Historically, the Son became the Mediator at the moment of His incarnation: there is "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5); as soon as He was born, He was hailed as "Christ, the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Formally, He was officially consecrated to this office at His baptism, when He was "anointed (Christed) with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38).

"But Christ being come an High Priest," and this according to the eternal oath of the Father, which "oath" was afterwards made known to the sons of men in time. This was before us when we considered Hebrews 7:20-25. It was "by the word of the oath" that the Son is consecrated to His priestly office (Heb. 7:28), the "oath" denoting God's eternal purpose and unchanging decree. In Psalm 2:7 we read that God said, "I will declare the decree," and accordingly in Psalm 110:4 we are told, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"—there it was openly published. That God's "oath" preceded Christ's entrance upon and discharge of His sacerdotal office is clear from Hebrews 7:20-25, otherwise the force of the apostle's reasoning there would be completely overthrown.

"But Christ being come an High Priest," otherwise He could not have "offered" Himself a sacrifice to God. As we saw when pondering Hebrews 5:6,7, Christ was exercising His sacerdotal functions in "the days of His flesh," i.e., the time of His humiliation. So too it was as "a merciful and faithful High Priest" that Christ "made propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). The types foreshadowed the same thing, especially Leviticus 16. Aaron was not constituted a priest by entering the holy of holies; he was such

before, or otherwise he could not have passed within the veil. Every passage which speaks of Christ's one oblation or His "offering" Himself once are conclusive as His being a priest on earth, for that word "once" cannot possibly be understood of what He is now doing in heaven; it must refer to His death as an historical fact, completed and finished here below: it is in designed contrast from His continuous intercession which is based upon it. The priestly sacrifice which He offered is emphatically described as co-incident with His death: Hebrews 9:26. Any one of the common people could slay the sin-offering (Lev. 4:27-29), but none save the priest could offer it to God (Lev. 4:30)! Thus, every verse which speaks of Christ "offering" Himself to God emphasizes the priestly character of His sacrifice.

"An high priest of good things to come." The reference here is to that more excellent dispensation which the Messiah was to inaugurate. Old Testament prophecy had announced many blessings and privileges which He would bring in, and accordingly the Jews had looked forward to better things than they had enjoyed under the old economy. The apostle here announces that this time had actually arrived, that the promised blessings had been procured by the High Priest of Christianity. As the result of Christ's advent, life and death, righteousness had been established, peace had been made, and a new and living way opened, which gave access to the very presence of God. Different far were these blessings from what the carnal Jews of Christ's day desired. Of course the "good things to come" are not to be restricted to those blessings which God's people already enjoy, but include as well those which yet await them. The "good things" are summed up in "grace and glory," and are in contrast from "the wrath to come" (Matthew 3:7).

"By a greater and more perfect tabernacle." This repeats what was said in Hebrews 8:2. The reference is to the human nature which the Son of God took unto Himself. "The Word became flesh and (Greek) tabernacled among us" (John 1:14). Christ officiated in a much more glorious habitation than any in which Aaron and his successors served. Most appropriately was the humanity of the Savior called a "tabernacle" for "in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Additional confirmation that the "greater and more perfect tabernacle" here referred to Christ's body, is supplied by Hebrews 10:20, where the Holy Spirit again applies to

Him the language of the Mosaic tabernacle and shows that in the Lord Jesus is found the antitype—"through the veil, that is to say His flesh."

"By a greater and more perfect tabernacle." There is both a comparison and a contrast between the tent which Moses pitched and the human habitat in which the Son of God abides: for the comparison we refer the reader to our comments upon Hebrews 8:2. The contrast is first pointed by the word "greater," the Antitype far surpassing the type both in dignity and worth. The humanity of Christ, in its conception, its framing, its gracious endowments by the Holy Spirit, and particularly because of its union to and subsistence in the divine person of the Son, was far more excellent and glorious than any earthly fabric could be. "The human nature of Christ doth thus more excel the old tabernacle, than the sun does the meanest star" (John Owen). Of old God declared, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Isa. 13:12)—a prophecy which obviously had its fulfillment in the Man Christ Jesus.

"And more perfect tabernacle": this points the second contrast between the type and the Antitype. As the word "greater" refers to the superior dignity and excellency of the humanity of Christ over the materials which comprised the tabernacle of Moses, so the "more perfect" respects its sacred use. The body of Christ was "more perfectly fitted and suited unto the end of a tabernacle, both for the inhabitation of the divine nature, and the means of exercising the sacerdotal office in making atonement for sin, than the other was. So it is expressed in Hebrews 10:5, 'Sacrifice and burnt-offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me.' This was that which God accepted, wherewith He was well pleased, when He rejected the other to that end" (John Owen). Probably the Holy Spirit has used this expression "more perfect" here because it was also through Christ's service in this "tabernacle" that His people had been "perfected forever."

"Not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building." Further reference is here made to the humanity of Christ by a double negation: "Not made with hands" is set in opposition to the Jewish tabernacle, which was made by the hands of men (Ex. 36:1-8). The humanity of Christ was the product of Him that hath no hands, even God Himself. Thus the expression here is the same as "which the

Lord pitched, and not man" in Hebrews 8:2. Then how much "greater" was the "more perfect Tabernacle"! The temple of Solomon was a most sumptuous and costly building, yet was it erected by human workmen, and therefore was it an act of infinite condescension for the great God to dwell therein: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27). Reference to the supernatural humanity of Christ was made in Daniel 2:45: He was to be a "Stone," cut out of the same quarry with us, yet "without hands," i.e., without the help of nature, begotten by a man.

"That is to say, not of this building," words added to further define the preceding clause—the term rendered "building" is translated "creature" in Hebrews 4:13. The humanity of Christ belonged to a totally different order of things than ours: there is no parallel in the whole range of creation. "Although the substance of His human nature was of the same kind with ours, yet the production of it in the world, was such an act of Divine power, as excels all other Divine operations whatever. Wherefore, God speaking of it, saith 'The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a Man' (Jer. 31:22) or conceive Him without natural generation" (John Owen). How blessed to see that God is so far from being confined to natural means for the effecting of His holy counsels, that He can, when He pleases, dispense with all the ordinary methods and "laws" by which He works, and act contrary to them.

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (verse 12). Having shown that in Christ's person we have the antitype of the tabernacle, the apostle now proceeds to set forth that which was foreshadowed by the entrance of Israel's high priest into the holy of holies on the day of atonement: this he does both negatively and positively, that the difference between the shadow and the substance might more evidently appear. The design of this verse is to display the pre-eminence of Christ in the discharge of His priestly office above the legal high priest. This is seen, first, in the excellency of His sacrifice, which was His own blood; second, in the holy place whereinto He entered by virtue of it, which was Heaven itself; third

in the effect of it, in that by it He procured "eternal redemption."

"Neither by the blood of goats and calves": it was by means of these that Aaron entered the holy of holies on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:14,15)—the apostle here uses the plural number because of the annual repetition of the same sacrifice. In Leviticus 16, the "calf" or young bullock (of one year old) is mentioned first; perhaps the order is here reversed because the "goat" was specifically for the people, and it is Christ redeeming His people which is the dominant thought. It was by virtue of the blood of these animals that Aaron entered so as to be accepted with God. The reference here is not directly to what the high priest brought with him into the holiest—or the "incense" too had been mentioned—but to the title which the sacrifices gave him to approach unto the Holy One of Israel.

"But by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place." Here we are brought directly unto the great mystery of the priestly work of Christ, especially as to the sacrifice which He offered unto (God to make an atonement for the sins of His people. The "holy place"—called in Hebrews 9:8 "the Holiest of all"—signifying Heaven itself, the dwelling-place of God. This is unequivocally established by Hebrews 9:24 "into heaven itself." There never was any place to which this title of "holy place" so suitably belonged: thus it is designated in Psalm 20:6 "His holy heaven." And when was it that Christ entered Heaven by virtue of the merits of His own blood? Almost all of the commentators take the reference here as being to His ascension. But this we deem to be a mistake, and one from which erroneous conclusions of a most serious nature have been drawn. The writer is fully satisfied that what is affirmed in this verse took place immediately after Christ, on the cross, triumphantly cried "It is finished." Some of our reasons for believing this we give below.

First, the typical priest's entrance within the veil took place immediately after the victim's death: its body being carried without the camp to be burned in a public place, its blood being taken into the holiest, to be sprinkled on the propitiatory, covering the ark. Those closely-connected acts in the ritual were so related that, the burning followed last in order. Now Hebrews 13:11 clearly establishes the fact that that typical action coincided with Christ's sacrifice outside Jerusalem: therefore, to make Christ's entrance into

heaven occur forty days after His death, destroys the type. In pouring out His blood on the cross and surrendering His spirit into the hands of the Father, Christ expiated sin, and at that very moment the veil of the temple was rent, to denote His entrance into the presence of God. No sooner had He expired, than He entered Heaven, claiming it for Himself and His seed. His resurrection testified to the fact that God had accepted His sacrifice, that justice had been fully satisfied, and that He was now entitled to the reward of His obedience. His resurrection was the antitype of Aaron's return from the holy of holies unto the people, which was designed as a proof that Divine wrath had been averted and forgiveness secured.

Second, Aaron began by laying aside his robes of glory (Lev. 16:4), putting on only linen garments: that was far more in keeping with Christ's abasement at the cross, than His triumph and glory at His ascension. Third, when Aaron entered the holy of holies, atonement was not yet completed: that awaited his sprinkling of the blood upon the propitiatory. Therefore, if the antitype of this occurred not until the ascension of Christ, His sacrifice waited forty days for God's acceptance of it. Fourth, while Aaron was within the veil, the people without were full of fear for the high priest, lest he fail to appease God. Similar was the state of Christ's disciples during the interval between His death and resurrection: they remained in a state of suspense and doubt, dejection and dread. But far different were they immediately after His ascension: contrast Luke 24:21 and 24:52, 53! Fifth, God's rending of the veil at the moment of Christ's death was deeply significant: it was the Divine imprimature upon the Son's "It is finished." It was the outward adumbration in the visible realm to image forth what had taken place in the spiritual—Christ's entrance into heaven. In like manner, Christ's appearance to the disciples after His death, and His "peace be unto you," evidenced that peace had been made, that the atonement was completed.

"By His own blood He entered in," entered heaven as the Surety of His people, as their "Forerunner" (Heb. 6:20). That which gave Him the right to do so was the perfect satisfaction which He had made, a satisfaction which honored God more than all our sins dishonored Him, which magnified the law and made it honorable. It was not the shedding of His blood alone which constituted His satisfaction or atonement, any more than a heart-belief in His

resurrection (Rom. 10:9) without "faith in His blood" (Rom. 3:25) would save a sinner. He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), and what He there voluntarily endured was the climax and consummation of His redemptive work. "His own blood" emphasises its inestimable value. It was the blood of the "Son" (Heb. 1:2, 3). It was the blood of "God" incarnate (Acts 20:28). Well might the Holy Spirit call it "precious" (1 Pet. 1:19). No greater price could have been paid for our redemption. How vile and accursed, then, must sin be, seeing it can only be expiated by so costly a sacrifice! What claims Christ has upon His own! Well might He say, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

"He entered in once into the holy place." The word "once" is that which has led so many to conclude that the reference was to the Savior's ascension. But this, we have endeavored to show above, is a mistake. As we shall (D.V.) yet see, Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 contemplate a double entrance of Christ into heaven in fulfillment of the double type—Aaron and Melchizedek. That Christ did enter heaven at death is clear from His words to the thief (Luke 23:43); 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 places "paradise" in the third heaven. In every other passage where the term "once" occurs concerning the atoning work of Christ, it is always used contrastively with the frequent repetitions of the Old Testament sacrifices: see Hebrews 7:27; 9:7, 25, 26; 10:11, 12. That which is contemplated is Christ's presenting His satisfaction unto God. His ascension was for the purpose of intercession, which is continuous, and not completed.

"Having obtained eternal redemption," and this before He entered Heaven. To "redeem" is to deliver a person from a state of bondage, and that by the payment of an adequate ransom-price. Four things were required unto our redemption. It must be effected by the expiating of our sins. It must be by such an expiation that God, as the supreme Ruler and Judge should accept. It must be by rendering such a satisfaction to the Law, that its precepts are fulfilled and its penalty endured, so that its curse is removed. It must annul the power of Satan over us. How all of this was accomplished by the Redeemer, we have shown in our articles upon His "Satisfaction." This "redemption" is eternal, which is in contrast from Israel's of old—after their deliverance from Egypt they became in bondage to the Philistines and others. As the blood of Christ can never lose its

efficacy, so none redeemed by Him can ever again be brought under sin's dominion.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ" (verses 13, 14). Having again demonstrated the pre-eminency of our Priest in verses 11, 12, the apostle now exhibits the superior efficacy of His sacrifice. By a synecdoche all sacrifices of expiation and all ordinances of purification appointed under the law are here summarized: the blood of lambs, etc., being included. The particular reference in the "ashes of an heifer" being to Numbers 19:2-17, with which should be carefully compared John 13:1-15. It is principally the use of the ordinance of Numbers 19 which is here in view. An heifer having been burned, its ashes were preserved, that, being mixed with pure water, they might be sprinkled on persons who had become legally unclean. When an Israelite, through contact with death, became ceremonially defiled, he was cut off from all the public worship of Jehovah; but when he carried out the instructions of Numbers 19 he was restored.

Those "ashes," then, were a most merciful provision of God; without them, all acceptable worship had soon ceased. They had an efficacy, for they availed to the purifying of the flesh, which was a temporary, external and ceremonial cleansing. Typically, they pointed to that spiritual, inward and eternal cleansing which the blood of Christ provides. "The defilements which befall believers are many, and some of them unavoidable whilst they live in this world: yea, the best of their services have defilements adhering to them. Were it not that the blood of Christ, in its purifying virtue, is in a continual readiness unto faith, that God therein had opened a fountain for sin and uncleanness, the worship of the church would not be acceptable unto Him. In a constant application thereunto, doth the exercise of faith much consist" (John Owen).

"How much more shall the blood of Christ," etc. If the blood and ashes of beasts, under the appointment of God, were efficacious unto an external and temporary justification and sanctification—that is, the removal of both guilt and ceremonial pollution—how much more shall the sacrifice of Him who was promised of old, was the Anointed and therefore the One ordained and accepted of God, effectually and eternally cleanse those to whom it is applied

"The blood of Christ is comprehensive of all that He did and suffered in order unto our redemption, inasmuch as the shedding of it was the way and means whereby He offered Himself (in and by it) unto God" (John Owen).

"Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself." There has been considerable difference of opinion as to whether the "eternal Spirit" has reference to the Divine nature of Christ animating and sustaining His humanity, or to the third Person of the Trinity. That which settles the point for us is this: Christ "offered Himself" to God: that is, in His entire person, while acting in His mediatorial office. As the Mediator, He took upon Him the "form of a servant," and therefore was He filled and energized by the Spirit in all that He did. Christ was "obedient unto death:" as He was subject to the Spirit in going into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1), so the Spirit led Him a willing victim to the cross. This wondrous statement shows us the perfect cooperation of the Eternal Three, concurring in the great work of redemption.

Christ offered Himself "without spot," to God. There is a double reference in these words: unto the purity of His person, and to the holiness of His life. There is both a moral and a legal sense to the expression. It speaks of Christ's fitness and meetness to be a sacrifice for our sins. Not only was there no blemish in His nature and no defect in His character, but there was every moral excellence. He had fulfilled the law in thought, word and deed, having loved the Lord His God with all His heart and His neighbor as Himself. Therefore was He fully qualified to act for His people.

"Purge your conscience from dead works." This is one of the effects produced by Christ's sacrifice, an effect which the legal ordinances were incapable of securing. Because Christ's sacrifice has expiated our sins, when the Spirit applies its virtues to the heart, that is, when He gives faith to appropriate them, our sense of guilt is removed, peace is communicated, and we are enabled to approach God not only without dread, but as joyous worshippers. The "conscience" is here specially singled out (cf. Hebrews 10:22 for the larger meaning) because it is the proper seat of the guilt of sin, charging it on the soul, and hindering an approach unto God. By "dead works" are meant our sins as unto their guilt and defilement—cf. our comments on Hebrews 6:1. True believers are delivered from the curse of the law, which is death.

"To serve the living God," not simply in outward form but in sincerity and in truth. This is the advantage and blessing which we receive from our conscience being purged. Christians have both the right and the liberty to "serve God." The "living God" cannot be served by those who are dead in sins, and therefore alienated from Him. But the sacrifice of Christ has purchased the gift of the Spirit unto all for whom He died, and the Spirit renews and equips the saint for acceptable worship. "This is the end of our purgation: for we are not washed by Christ that we may plunge ourselves again into new filth, but that our purity may serve to glorify God" (John Calvin). Under the word "serve" is comprised all the duties which we owe unto God, not only as His creatures, but as His children. Then let us earnestly seek grace to put Romans 12:1 into daily practice.

Hebrews 9:15

Chapter 42 - The Mediator

The proposition which the apostle is occupied with proving and illustrating in this section of the epistle is that which was laid down in Hebrews 8:6, "But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." In the verses which were before us in the last article, the superiority of Christ over Aaron was brought out in the following respects. First, in that He officiated in a more excellent tabernacle (verse 11). Second, in that He offered to God a superior sacrifice (verses 11, 14). Third, in that He has entered a more glorious sanctuary (verse 12). Fourth, in that He secured a more efficacious redemption (verse 12). Fifth, in that He was moved by a more excellent Spirit (verse 14). Sixth, in that He obtained for His people a better cleansing (verse 14). Seventh, in that He made possible for them a nobler service (verse 14).

Christ has "obtained eternal redemption" for His people. As we pointed out in our last article, to "redeem" signifies to liberate by the paying of a ransom-price: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). The freedom which the Christian has is, first, a legal one: he has been "redeemed from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13). Because of this, second, he enjoys an experimental freedom from the power of sin: "sin shall not have dominion over you" (Rom. 6:14). Justification and sanctification are never separated: where God imputes the righteousness of Christ. He also imparts a principle of holiness, the latter being the fruit or consequence of the former; both being necessary before we can be admitted into heaven. Because the blood of Christ has fully met every claim of God upon and against His people, its virtues and purifying effects are applied to them by the Spirit. Both of these were foreshadowed under the Levitical types of the old economy, and are seen in Hebrews 9:13.

"The blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean" sanctified "to the purifying of the flesh."

There is here both a comparison and a contrast. The comparison is between the type and the Antitype; the contrast, between what the one and what the other effected. Those typical rites procured only a temporary "redemption" from the governmental consequences of sin; Christ's sacrifice has secured an "eternal redemption" from all the consequences of sin. A double type is referred to in Hebrews 9:13. No single sacrifice could adequately represent the power and efficacy of the blood of Christ. By the "blood of bulls and goats" the guilt of Israel's sins were temporarily removed; by the sprinkling of the "ashes of an heifer" they were ceremonially purified from the defilements of the wilderness. We quote below a valuable footnote from Adolph Saphir:

"The ashes of an heifer. It was to take away the defilement of death. The institution is recorded in the book of Numbers as relating to the provision God makes for His people in their wilderness journey. As no blood of the slain victim was 'incorruptible,' it was necessary, in order to show the cleansing by blood from defilement through contact with death to have as it were the essential principle of blood, presented in a permanent and available form. The red heifer, which had never been under the yoke, symbolizes life in its most vigorous, perfect, and fruitful form. She was slain without the camp (Heb. 13:11, Numbers 19:3, 4). She was wholly burnt, flesh, skin, and blood, the priest casting cedar-wood, hyssop, and scarlet into the fire. The ashes of the burnt heifer, put into flowing water, were then sprinkled with hyssop for ceremonial purification . . . Christ is the fulfillment. For the blood of Christ is not merely, so to speak, the key unlocking the holy of holies to Him as our High Priest and Redeemer, it is not merely our ransom by which we are delivered out of bondage, and, freed from the curse, are brought nigh unto God; but it also separates us from death and sin. It is incorruptible, always cleansing and vivifying; through this blood we are separated from this evil world, and overcome; by this blood we keep our garments white (John 6:53, Revelation 7:14).

"What had necessarily to be separated in the types, is here in unity and perfection. Likewise, what really and potentially is given to us when we are first brought into the state of reconciliation and access, of justification and sanctification, is in our actual experience continually repeated. We have been cleansed and sanctified once and forever; the same blood, remembered and believed in, cleanseth us

continually. The difference between this continual cleansing and the first (according to John 13:10) must never be forgotten, or we fall into a legal condition, going back from the holy of holies into the holy place. But, on the other hand we must not forget the living character of the blood, which by the Spirit is continually applied to us, and by which we have peace, renewal of the sense of pardon, and strength for service (1 Pet. 1:2)."

Having pointed out what God's people are redeemed from, the Holy Spirit next makes a brief notice of what Christ has redeemed unto. He has delivered us from the curse of the law and the bondage of sin; He has also procured for us an "eternal inheritance": His satisfaction has merited for us the favor and image of God and everlasting bliss in His presence. In referring to this, the Spirit also takes occasion to bring out the fact that the sacrifice of Christ was necessary in order for God to make good His promises of old. Herein too He once more meets the Jewish prejudice—why must this great High Priest die? The death of Christ was requisite in order to the accomplishing of God's engagements to Abraham and his (spiritual) seed, to confirm His covenant-pledges, which, once more, brings into view the relation which Christ sustains to the everlasting covenant.

"And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (verse 15). Each word in this verse requires to be duly weighed and carefully considered both in the light of what immediately precedes and follows, otherwise we are certain to err. The opening "And" is plain intimation that no new subject begins here, which at once disposes of the figment that this and the next verses require to be placed in a parenthesis. The apostle continues to treat of what was before him in the verses which we considered in the last article. He is still showing the excellency of our High Priest and the superior efficacy of His sacrifice. That the contents of this verse are by no means free from difficulty is readily allowed, yet its leading thoughts are plain enough.

"And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament." The Greek words for "for this cause" are rendered "therefore" in Hebrews 1:9 and other places. They signify, because of this, or for this reason. There has been a great deal of discussion

as to precisely what is referred to in "for this cause": some insisting that it looks back to what has been affirmed in the previous verses, others contending that it points forward to that which is declared in the second half of this verse. Personally, we believe that both are included. There is a fullness to God's words which is not to be found in man's, and whenever an expression is capable of two or more meanings, warranted by the context and the analogy of faith, both should be retained. Let us then look at the two thoughts here brought together.

"For this cause": because of the superior nature and efficacy of the sacrifice which Christ was to offer, God appointed Him to be the Mediator of the new covenant. It was out of (prospective) regard unto the fitness of Christ's person and the excellency of His offering, that God ordained Him to make mediation between Himself and His fallen people. Because He should make an effectual atonement for their sins and provide a way whereby their troubled consciences might have peace, God decreed that His Son, becoming incarnate, should interpose between poor sinners and the awful Majesty they have offended. "For this cause": and also, because it was only by means of death that the transgressions under the first testament could be redeemed and the called receive the promise of eternal inheritance, Christ was appointed Mediator of the new covenant.

With his usual sagacity John Owen combined both ideas: "It is evident there is a reason rendered in these words, of the necessity of the death and sacrifice of Christ, by which alone our consciences may be purged from dead works. And this reason is intended in these words, 'For this cause.' And this necessity of the death of Christ, the apostle proves both from the nature of His office, namely, that He was to be the Mediator of the new covenant, which, being a testament, required the death of the testator; and from what was to be effected thereby, namely, the redemption of transgressions, and the purchase of an eternal inheritance. Wherefore, these are the things which he hath respect unto in these words."

"He is the Mediator of the new testament." It seems strange that some of the best of the expositors understand this to mean that after Christ had "offered Himself without spot to God" he became "the Mediator," which is indeed a turning of things upside down and a putting an effect for a cause. A mediator is one who stands between two parties, and two parties at variance, and that with the

object of settling the difference between them, that is, of effecting a reconciliation. Hence we read, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6). The second half of our verse ought to have prevented such a blunder: "He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

As we pointed out in our comments upon Hebrews 8:6, it is most important to recognize that Christ is a sacerdotal Mediator, that is, one who has interposed His sacrifice and intercession between God and His people in order to their reconciliation. In voluntarily undertaking to serve as Mediator between God and His people considered as fallen creatures, two things were required from Christ. First, that He should completely remove that which kept the covenanters at a distance, that is, take away the cause of enmity between them. Second, that He should purchase and procure, in a way suited unto the glory of God, the actual communication of all the good things—summed up in "grace and glory" (Ps. 84:11)—which belong to those whose Surety He was. This is the foundation of the "merits" of Christ and of the grant of all blessings unto us for His sake.

In what has just been pointed out, we may perceive an additional signification to the opening "And" of our verse. Christ is not only "High Priest" (verses 11-14), but "Mediator" too. He undertook office upon office in order to our greater good. Christ is, in the "new covenant" or "testament," the Mediator, Surety, Priest and Sacrifice, all in His own person. In order that we may have something like a definite conception of these, let us consider, separately, the various relations which our blessed Redeemer sustains to the everlasting covenant. First, He is the Surety of it: Hebrews 7:22. As such He engaged to render full satisfaction to God on behalf of His people, to do and suffer for them all that the law required. He transferred to Himself all their obligations, undertaking to pay all their debts. In other words, He substituted Himself in their place and stead, in consequence of which there was a double imputation: God reckoning to Christ all their liabilities, God imputing to them His perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

As the "Surety" Christ most blessedly fulfilled the type of

Genesis 43:9, being Sponsor to His Father for all His beloved Benjamins, Hebrews 2:13, Isaiah 49:5, 6, John 10:16. Second, as the Mediator of the covenant (Heb. 12:24), He took His place between God and His people, undertaking to maintain the interests and secure the honor of both parties, by perfectly reconciling the one to the other. As the "Mediator" Christ has blessedly fulfilled the type of Jacob's "ladder," uniting heaven and earth. Third, as the Messenger (Mal. 3:1) or "Angel" of the covenant (Rev. 8:3-5) He makes known God's purpose and will to His people, and presents their requests and worship to Him. Fourth, as the Testator of the covenant (Heb. 9:16) He has ratified it and made bequests and gifts to His people. Finally, and really first, as the Head of the whole election of grace, the covenant was made with Him by God: Psalm 89:3, etc.

"For this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament." Here again there has been an almost endless controversy as to whether this last word should be rendered "covenant" or "testament," that is, "will." The same Greek word has been translated by both these English terms, some think wrongly so, for a "covenant" is, strictly speaking, an agreement or contract between two parties: the one promising to do certain things upon the fulfillment of certain conditions by the other; whereas a "testament" or "will" is where one bequeaths certain things as gifts. Thus there seems to be little or nothing in common between the two concepts, in fact, that which is quite contrary. Nevertheless, our English translators have rendered the Greek word both ways, and we believe, rightly so. Nevertheless it remains for us to enquire, why should the same term be rendered "covenant" in Hebrews 8:6 and "testament" in Hebrews 9:15? Briefly, the facts are as follows.

First, the word "diatheke" occurs in the Greek New Testament thirty-three times, having been translated (in the A.V.) "covenant" twenty times (twice in the plural number) and "testament" thirteen times, four of the latter being used in connection with the Lord's supper. Second, in the Sept. version (the translation of the Hebrews Old Testament into Greek) this word "diatheke" occurs just over two hundred and fifty times, where, in the great majority of instances, it is used to translate "berith." Third, the Greek word "diatheke" is not that which properly denotes a covenant, compact, or agreement; instead, the technical terms for that is "syntheke," but the Spirit never once uses this word in the

New Testament. Fourth, on the other hand, it should be noted that the Hebrew language has no distinctive word which means a will or testament. Fifth, the most common use of the term "diatheke" in the New Testament, particularly in 2 Corinthians 3 and in Hebrews, neither denotes a "covenant" proper (a stipulated agreement) nor a "will," but instead, an economy, a dispensational arrangement or ordering of things.

Now it needs to be very carefully noted that from Hebrews 9:15 to the end of the chapter, the apostle argues from the nature of a will or "testament" among men, as he distinctly affirms in verse 16. His manifest object in so doing was to confirm the Christian's faith in the expectation of the benefits of this "covenant" or "testament." Nor did he violate the rules of language in this, straining neither the meaning of the Hebrews "berith" nor the Greek "diatheke," for there is, actually, a close affinity between the two things. There are "covenants" which have in them free grants or donations, which is of the nature of a "testament"; and there are "testaments" whose force is resolved into conditions and agreements—as when a man wills an estate to his wife on the stipulation that she remains a widow—which is borrowed from the nature of a "covenant."

If we go back to the Old Testament and study the various "covenants" which God made with men, it will be found again and again that they were merely declarations whereby He would communicate good things unto them, which has more of the nature of a "testament" in it. Sometimes the word "covenant" was used simply to express a free promise, with an effectual donation and communication of the thing promised, which also has more of the nature of a "testament" than of a "covenant." Thus, once more, we perceive a fullness in the words of the Holy Spirit which definitions from human dictionaries do not include. That which was a "covenant," has become to us a testament. The "covenant" was made by God with Christ. By His death that which God pledged Himself to do unto the heirs of promise in return for the work which Christ was to perform, is now bequeathed to us as a free gift: what was a legal stipulation between the Father and the Mediator, comes to us purely as a matter of grace.

Some have insisted that "the Mediator of the new covenant" is understandable, but that "Mediator of the new testament" is no more intelligible than the "testator of a covenant" would be. Our

answer is that, the Spirit of God is not tied by the artificial rules which bind human grammarians. Romans 8:17 tells us that Christians are "heirs of God," that is of the Father, yet He has not died! No figure must be pressed too far. Some have argued that because the Church is the Body of Christ, it cannot also be His "Bride," but such carnal reasoning is altogether inadmissible upon spiritual and Divine things; as well might we argue that because Christ calls us "brethren" (Heb. 2:12), therefore we cannot be His "children" (Heb. 2:13); or that because Christ is the "everlasting Father" of Israel (Isa. 9:6), He cannot also be their "Husband" (Isa. 54:5). The truth is, that Christ is both the Mediator of the new covenant, and the Mediator of the new testament, looking at the same office from two different angles. God has so confirmed the promises in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20), that at His death He made a legacy of them and bequeathed them to His people in a testamentary form.

To sum up what has been said on this difficult but important subject: throughout the New Testament the Holy Spirit has intentionally used only the one word "diatheke"—though there was another in the Greek language ("syntheke") which more exactly expressed a "covenant"—because it was capable of a double application, and that, because the Son of God is not only the Mediator of a new covenant, but also the Testator of His own gifts. Thereby God would fix our gaze on the cross of Christ and see there that what had up to that day existed as a "covenant," then ,became for the first time, a "testament"; and that while the covenant between the Father and the Son is from everlasting, the "new testament" dates only from Calvary.

"For the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament." This states one of the principal ends which God had in view when appointing Christ to be the "Mediator," namely, to deliver His people from all the bondage they were subject to as the result of their violations of His law, and that by the payment of a satisfactory price. But, it may be asked, why not "the redemption of the transgressors" rather than "transgressions"? Did Christ purchase sins? The reference is to His expiation of His people's iniquities, and they were "debts," and Christ's death was a discharge of that debt. "The discharge of a debt is a buying it out. Thus to redeem sins is no more harsh a phrase than to be 'delivered for our offenses' (Rom. 4:25), or 'who gave Himself for our sins' (Gal. 1:4), or to be

‘merciful to their unrighteousness,’ Hebrews 8:12’ (William Gouge).

"For the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament." In these words the Spirit makes a further exhibition of the virtue and efficacy of Christ's death, by affirming that it paid the price of remitting the sins of the Old Testament saints. Here again the apostle is countering the Jewish prejudice. The death of Christ was necessary not only if sinners of New Testament times should be fitted to serve the living God (verse 14), but also to meet the claims which God had against the Old Testament saints. The efficacy of Christ's atonement was retrospective as well as prospective: cf. Romans 3:25. The true (in contrast from the typical), spiritual (in contrast from the ceremonial), and eternal (in contrast from the temporal), "redemption" of the Old Testament saints was effected by the sacrifice of Christ. The same thing is clearly implied in Hebrews 9:26: had not the one offering of Christ—as the Lamb "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19, 20)—been of perpetual efficacy from the days of Abel onwards, then it had been necessary to repeat it constantly in order to redeem believers of each generation. It was God's eternal purpose that Christ's atonement, settled in the "everlasting covenant," should be available to faith from the beginning. Hence, the apostle said. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins (cf. Galatians 3:8, Hebrews 4:2), and by Him all that believe—Old Testament saints as truly as the New Testament—are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38, 39).

"Now, if any one asks, whether sins under the Law were remitted to the fathers, we must bear in mind the solution already stated,—that they were remitted; but remitted through Christ. Then notwithstanding their external expiations, they were always held guilty. For this reason Paul says that the law was a handwriting against us (Col. 2:14). For when the sinner came forward and openly confessed that he was guilty before God, and acknowledged by sacrificing an innocent animal that he was worthy, of eternal death, what did he obtain by his victim, except that he sealed his own death as it were by this handwriting? In short, even then they only reposed in the remission of sins, when they looked to Christ. But if only a regard to Christ took away sins, they could never have been freed from them, had they continued to rest in the law" (John Calvin).

"For the redemption of the transgressions under the first

testament.” It remains for us to ask, Why this limitation? for Christ atoned for the sins of those who were to believe as much as for those who had, before He became incarnate, looked in faith to Him. First, because a measure of doubt or uncertainty could exist only concerning them. Some have taught, and possibly some in the apostle’s day thought, that naught but earthly blessings would be the portion of those who died before the present dispensation. Therefore to remove such a doubt, it is affirmed that Old Testament believers too were redeemed by Christ’s blood. Second, because the apostle had pressed so hard the fact that the Levitical sacrifices could not remove moral guilt from those who lived under the Mosaic economy, he shows Christ’s sacrifice had. Third, because by just consequence it follows that, if those who trusted Christ of old had redemption of their transgressions through Him, much more they who are under the new testament. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7): it was just as efficacious in taking away the transgressions of believers before it was actually shed, as it is of cleansing believers today, nineteen centuries after it was shed.

"They which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” Here the "heirs" are designated by character rather than by name, by this qualification (Greek) "they which have been called," that is, effectually so, or truly converted to God. In John 1:12 this privilege of heir-ship is settled upon "believers," such as do heartily accept of Christ and His grace. In Acts 26:18 and Colossians 1:12 the heirs are described as "sanctified," that is, as personally dedicated to God and set apart to live unto Him. This expression "the called" is a descriptive appellation of the true spiritual people of God, and looks back to the "call" of Abraham (Heb. 11:8), who, in consequence of the mighty workings of divine grace in his heart, turned his back upon the world and the things of the flesh (Gen. 12:1), and entered the path of faith’s obedience to God. Only those possessing these marks are the spiritual "children" of Abraham, such as have been "called with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9).

"Might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." This is the goal toward which the apostle has been steadily moving, as he has passed from clause to clause in this verse. That the called of God might receive the promise of eternal inheritance was the grand ultimate object of the "everlasting covenant" so far as men are

concerned, and the chief design of the new testament. But an obstacle stood in the way, namely, the transgressions or sins of those who should be "called." In order to the removal of that obstacle, Christ must die that death which was due unto those transgressions. For the Son of God to die, He must be appointed unto a mediatorial position and become incarnate. Because He was so appointed, because He did so die, because He has redeemed from all transgressions, the "eternal inheritance" is sure unto all His people, His heirs, the "called" of God.

"Might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." The children of Israel received from God an external call which separated them from the heathen, and when they were redeemed from Egypt they received promise of a temporal or earthly inheritance. But inside that Nation was "a remnant according to the election of grace," and they, individually, received from God an inward call, which made them the heirs of an eternal inheritance. It is of these latter that our verse speaks, yet as including also the saints of the present dispensation. Promise of an "eternal inheritance" had the Old Testament saints. They had the Gospel preached unto them (Heb. 4:2). They were saved through "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:11) as well as we. They "did all eat the same spiritual meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink," even Christ (1 Cor. 10:3, 4). And therefore did they "desire a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb. 11:16). How all of this sets aside the preposterous figment of the modern "dispensationalists," who relegate "Israel" to an inferior inheritance from that which belongs to "the Church"!

"Might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." What is meant by the first four words here? First, let us very briefly define the "eternal inheritance." By it we understand God's "great salvation" (Heb. 2:3), considering it in its most comprehensive sense, as including justification, sanctification and glorification. It is that blessed estate which Christ has purchased for "His own," here called an "inheritance" to remind us that the way whereby we come unto it is by a gratuitous adoption, and not by any merits of our own. Now as the state of those who are to receive it is twofold, namely, in this life and in that which is to come, so there are two parts of this inheritance: "grace and glory." Even now "eternal life" is communicated to those who are called according to God's purpose.

But "grace" is only "glory" begun: the best "wine" is reserved for the time to come. For the future aspect of the "eternal inheritance" see 1 Peter 1:3-5.

The way whereby God conveys this "eternal inheritance" is by "promise": see Galatians 3:18 and Hebrews 6:15-18. And this for a threefold reason at least. First, to manifest the absolute freeness of the grant of it: the "promise" is everywhere opposed unto everything of "works" or desert in ourselves: Romans 4:14, etc. Second, to give security unto all the heirs of it, for the very veracity and faithfulness of God is behind the promise: Titus 1:1, etc. Since God has "promised" to bestow the "inheritance," nothing in, of, or from the heirs can possibly be an occasion of their forfeiting it: 1 Thessalonians 5:24. Third, that it might be by faith, for what God promises necessarily requires faith, and faith only, unto its reception: Romans 4:16. The "receive the promise" has a double force. First, it is to "mix faith" with it (Heb. 4:2), to appropriate it (Heb. 11:13, 17), so as not to stagger at it in unbelief (Rom. 4:20, 21). Second, it is to receive the fulfillment of it. As unto the foundation of the whole inheritance, in the sacrifice of Christ, and all the grace, mercy and love, with the fruits thereof, these are communicated to believers in this life: Galatians 3:14. As unto the consummation, the future state in glory, we "receive the promise" by faith, rest thereon, and live in the joyous expectation of it: Hebrews 11:13.

In conclusion, let us sum up the contents of this remarkable verse, adopting the analysis of John Owen. 1. God has designed an "eternal inheritance" unto certain persons. 2. The way in which a right or title is conveyed thereunto is by "promise." 3. The persons unto whom this inheritance is designed, are the "called." 4. The obstacle which stood in the way of their enjoyment of this inheritance was their "transgressions." 5. That this obstacle might be removed, and the inheritance enjoyed, God made a "new covenant," because none of the sacrifices under the first covenant, could expiate sins. 6. The ground of the efficacy of the "new covenant" unto this end was, that it had a Mediator, a great High Priest. 7. The means whereby the Mediator of the new covenant did expiate the sins against the first testament was by "death," and this of necessity, seeing that this new covenant, being also a "testament," required the death of the Testator. 8. The death of this Mediator has taken away sins by "the redemption of transgressions." Thus, the promise is sure

unto all the seed.

Hebrews 9:16-22

Chapter 43 - The New Testament

Having affirmed (Heb. 9:12, 14) that the blood of Christ is the means of the believer's redemption, in verse 15, the apostle proceeds to make further proof of this basic and vital truth. His argument here is taken from the design and object of Christ's priesthood, which was to confirm the covenant God had made with His people, and which could only be done by blood. First, he affirms that the Savior was "the Mediator of the new testament." Many functions were undertaken by Him. Just as one type could not set forth all that the Lord Jesus did and suffered, so no single office could display all the relations which He sustained and all the benefits He procured for us. That which is done by a prophet, by a priest, by a king, by a surety, by a mediator, by a husband, by a father, that and more has been done by Christ. And the more dearly we observe in Scripture the many undertakings of Christ for us, as seen in His varied relations, the more will He be endeared to our hearts, and the more will faith be strengthened.

Christ's undertaking to be a "Mediator" both procured a covenant to pass between God and men, and also engaged Himself for the performance thereof on both parts. This could only be by a full satisfaction being rendered to Divine justice, by the shedding of blood infinitely valuable as His was. To assure His people of their partaking of the benefits of God's covenant, the cross of Christ has turned that covenant into a testament, so that the conditions of the covenant on God's part (its requirements: namely, perfect obedience rendered to His law, and thus "everlasting righteousness" being brought in: Daniel 9:24; and full satisfaction being taken by the law for the sins of His people) might be so many legacies, which being ratified by the death of the Testator, none might disannul.

Unspeakably blessed as are the truths expressed (so freely) above, there is another which is still more precious for faith to apprehend and rest on, and that is, that behind all offices (so to speak), lying at the foundation of the whole dispensation of God's

grace toward His people, is the mystical oneness of Christ and His Church: a legal oneness, which ultimates by the Spirit's work in a vital union, so that Christ is the Head and believers are the members of one Person (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). This, and this alone, constituted the just ground for God to impute to Christ all the sins of His people, and to impute to them the righteousness of Christ for their justification of life. What Christ did in obeying the law is reckoned to them as though that obedience had been performed by them; and in like manner, what they deserved on account of their sins was charged to and endured by Him, as though they themselves had suffered it: see 2 Corinthians 5:21.

The first spring of the union between Christ and His Church lay in that eternal compact between the Father and the Son respecting the salvation of His people contemplated as fallen in Adam. In view of the human nature which He was to assume, the Lord Christ was "predestinated" or "foreordained" (1 Pet. 1:20) unto grace and glory, and that by virtue of the union of flesh unto His Godhead. This grace and glory of the God-man was the exemplary cause and pattern of our predestination: Romans 8:29, Philippians 3:21. It was also the cause and means of the communicating of all grace and glory unto us, for we were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Christ was thus elected (Isa. 42:1) as Head of the Church, His mystical body. All the elect of God were then committed unto Him, to be delivered from sin and death, and brought unto the enjoyment of God: John 17:6, Revelation 1:5, 6.

In the prosecution of this design of God, and to effect the accomplishment of the "everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20), Christ undertook to be the "Surety" of that covenant (Heb. 7:22), engaging to answer for all the liabilities of His people and to discharge all their legal responsibilities. Yet was it as Priest that Christ acted as Surety: God's "Priest," our "Surety." That is to say, all the activities of Christ were of a sacerdotal character, having God for their immediate object; but as these activities were all performed on our behalf, He was a Surety or Sponsor for us also. As the "Surety" of the covenant, Christ undertook to discharge all the debts of those who are made partakers of its benefits. As our Surety He also merited and procured from God the Holy Spirit, to communicate to His people all needful supplies of grace to make them new creatures,

which enables them to yield obedience to God from a new principle of spiritual life, and that faithfully unto the end.

When considering the administration of the "everlasting covenant" in time, we contemplate the actual application of the grace, benefits and privileges of it unto those for whose sakes it was devised and drawn up. For this the death of the Mediator was required, for only through His blood-shedding is the whole grace of the covenant made effectual unto us. This it is which is affirmed in Hebrews 9:15, and which we considered at length in our last article. In the passage which is now to be before us, the apostle does two things: first, he refers to a well known fact which is everywhere recognized among men, namely, that a will or testament requires the death of the testator to give it validity. Second, he refers to an Old Testament type which exemplifies the principle which he is here setting before us.

"For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (verses 16, 17). That which is found in verses 16-23 is really of the nature of a parenthesis, brought in for the purpose of showing why it was necessary for the incarnate Son to die. In verse 24 the apostle returns to his proofs for the superiority of the ministry of Christ over Aaron's. What we have in verses 16, 17, is brought in to show both the need for and the purpose of the death of Christ, the argument being drawn from the character and design of that covenant of which He is the Mediator. Because that covenant was also to be a "testament" it was confirmed by the death of the Testator. Appeal is made to the only use of a will or testament among men.

The method by which the apostle here demonstrates the necessity of Christ's death as He was "the mediator of the new testament" is not merely from the signification of the word "diatheke" (though we must not lose sight of its force), but as he is speaking principally of the two "covenants" (i.e., the two forms under which the "everlasting covenant" has been administered), it is the affinity which there is between a solemn covenant, and a testament, that he has respect unto. For it is to be carefully noted that the apostle speaks not of the death of Christ merely as it was a death, which is all that is required of a "testament" as such, without any consideration of the nature of the testator's death; but he speaks of it

also (and primarily) as it was a sacrifice by the shedding of His blood (verses 12, 14, 18-23), which belongs to a Divine covenant, and is in no way required by a "testament." Thus, we see again the needs-be for retaining the double meaning and force of the Greek word here.

There has been much needless wrangling over the Divine person alluded to under the word "Testator," some insisting it is Christ, some the Father, others arguing the impossibility of the latter because the Father has never died. We believe that, in this case, Saphir was right when he said, "The testator is, properly speaking, God; for we are God's heirs; but it is God in Christ." Had he referred the reader to 2 Corinthians 5:19 his statement had been given scriptural confirmation. The "everlasting covenant" or Covenant of Grace has the nature of a "testament" from these four considerations or facts. First, it proceeded from the will of God: He freely made it (Heb. 6:17). Second, it contained various legacies or gifts: to Christ, God bequeathed the elect as His inheritance (Deut. 32:9, Psalm 16:6, Luke 22:29); to the elect themselves, that they should be joint-heirs with Him (Rom. 8:17, Revelation 3:21). Third, it is unalterable (Gal. 3:15), "ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5); having been duly witnessed to (1 John 5:7), hence, being of the nature of a "testament" there are no stipulations for men to fulfill (Gal. 3:18). Fourth, the death of Christ has secured the administration of it.

A deed is not valid without a seal; a will cannot be probated until the legatee dies, nor were God's covenants with men (the historical adumbrations of the "everlasting covenant") ratified except by blood-shedding. Thus it was with His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:9, 18); thus it was with His covenant with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 24:6). Thus, unto the confirmation of a "testament" there must be the death of the testator; unto the ratification of a "covenant" the blood of a sacrifice was required. Thereby does the apostle prove conclusively the necessity for the sacrificial death of Christ as the Mediator, both as the Mediator of a "covenant" and as the Mediator of a "testament": for through His sacrificial death, both the promises contained in the "covenant" and the bequeathments of the "testament," are made irrevocably sure to all His seed. We trust, then that we have been enabled to clear up the great difficulty which the word "diatheke" has caused so many, and shown that it has a double meaning and force in this passage.

It remains for us to point out that the Old Testament supplies us with a most striking type which blessedly illustrates the principle enunciated in this 16th verse. But note first of all that verse 15 opens with "For" and that this comes right after the mention of "the Mediator of the new testament," and the promise of "eternal inheritance" in verse 15. Now the "mediator" of the "Old Testament" was Moses, and it was not until his death, though immediately after it, that Israel entered their inheritance, the land of Canaan! Looked at from the standpoint of God's government, the death of Moses was because of his sin (Num. 20:10-12); but considered in relation to his official position, as "the servant over the house of God," it had another and deeper meaning as Deuteronomy 3:26 shows, "the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes"—how blessedly did this foreshadow the reason why God's wrath was visited upon Christ: Christ, as Moses, must die before the inheritance could be ours.

In verse 17 it is not of the making of a testament which is referred to, but its execution: its efficacy depends solely on the testator's death. The words "is of force" mean, is firm and cannot be annulled; it must be executed according to the mind of the one who devised it. The reason why it is of "no strength" during his lifetime, is because it is then subject to alteration, according to the pleasure of him who made it. All the blessings of "grace and glory" were the property of Christ, for He was "appointed Heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2): but in His death, He made a bequeathment of them unto all the elect. Another analogy between a human testament and the testamentary character of Christ's death is that, an absolute grant is made without any conditions. So is the kingdom of heaven bequeathed to all the elect, so that nothing can defeat His will. Whatever there is in the Gospel which prescribes conditions, that belongs to it as it is a "covenant" and not as a "testament." Finally, the testator assigns the time when his heirs shall be admitted into the actual possession of his goods; so too has Christ determined the season when each shall enter both into grace and glory.

Perhaps a brief word should be added by way of amplification to the bare statement made above respecting the conditions which the Gospel prescribes unto those who are the beneficiaries of Christ's "testament." Repentance and faith are required by the Gospel; yet, strictly speaking they are not "conditions" of our entering into the enjoyment of Christ's gifts.

Faith is a means to receive and partake of the things promised, repentance is a qualification whereby we may know that we are the persons to whom such promises belong. Nevertheless, it is to be remembered that He who has made the promises works in His elect these graces of repentance and faith: Acts 5:31, Philippians 1:29.

"It is a great and gracious condescension in the Holy Spirit to give encouragement and confirmation unto our faith, by a representation of the truth and reality of spiritual things, in those which are temporal and agreeing with them in their general nature, whereby they are presented unto the common understandings of men. This way of proceeding the apostle calls, a speaking 'after the manner of men' (Gal. 3:15). Of the same kind were all the parables used by our Savior; for it is all one whether these representations be taken from things real, or from those which, according unto the same rule of reason and right, are framed on purpose for that end" (John Owen).

"Whereupon neither the first was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" (verses 18-22).

In these verses the apostle is still pressing upon the Hebrews the necessity for the blood-shedding of Christ. Their national history witnessed to the fact that when God entered into covenant with their fathers, that covenant was confirmed by solemn sacrifice. In the verses upon which we are now to comment, the apostle is not merely proving that the old covenant or testament was confirmed with blood, for had that been his only object, he could have dispatched it in very few words; rather does he also declare what was the use of blood in sacrifices on all occasions under the law, and thereby he demonstrates the use and efficacy of Christ's blood as unto the ends of the new covenant. The ends of the blood under the old covenant were two, namely, purification and pardon, both of which were confirmed in the expiation of sin. Unless the main design of the Spirit in these verses be steadily kept in view, we miss the deeper

meaning of many of their details.

What has just been said above, supplies the explanation of what has seemed a problem to some, namely that in these verses the apostle mentions five or six details which are not found in the historical narrative of Exodus 24. But the Holy Spirit is not here limiting our view to Exodus 24, but gathers up what is found in various places of the law; and that, because He not only designed to prove the dedication of the covenant by blood, but also to show the whole use of the blood under the law, as unto purification and remission of sin. And He does this with the purpose of declaring the virtue and efficacy of the blood of Christ under the new testament, whereunto He makes an application of all the things in the verses which follow. The "Moreover" at the beginning of verse 21 is plain intimation that the Spirit is here contemplating something in addition to that which is found in Exodus 24.

Verse 18. The opening word is usually rendered "therefore" or "wherefore": it denotes the drawing of an inference; it confirms a general rule by a special instance. In verse 16 the general rule is stated; now, says the apostle, think it not strange that the new testament was confirmed by the death of the Testator, for this is so necessary that, the first one also was confirmed in the same manner; and that, not only by death, but not "without blood," which was required for the ratification of a solemn covenant. That to which reference is made is the "first" testament or covenant. Here the apostle makes clear what he intended by the first or old covenant, on which he had discoursed at large in chapter 8: it was the covenant made with Israel at Horeb. Just a few words on the character of it.

Its terms had all the nature of a formal covenant. These were the things written in the book (Ex. 24:4, 7) which were an epitome of the whole law, as contained in Exodus 20-23. The revelation of its terms were made by Jehovah Himself, speaking with awful voice from the summit of Sinai: Exodus chapters 19, 20. Following the fundamental rule of the covenant, as contained in the Ten Commandments, were other statutes and rites, given for the directing of their walking with God. The same was solemnly delivered to Israel by Moses, and proposed unto them for their acceptance. Upon their approbation of it, the book was read in the hearing of all the people after it had been duly sprinkled with the blood of the covenant (Ex. 24:7). Thereupon, for the first time,

Jehovah was called "The God of Israel" (Ex. 24:10), and that by virtue of the covenant. This formed the foundation of His consequent dealings with them: all His chastening judgments upon Israel were due to their breaking of His covenant.

While there is a contrast, sharp and clear, between the Old Testament and the new, yet it should not be overlooked that there was also that which bound them together. This was ably expressed by Adolph Saphir: "The promise given to Abraham, and not to Moses, was not superseded or forgotten in the giving of the law. When God dealt with Israel in the wilderness, He gave them the promise that they should be a peculiar treasure unto Him above all people: 'for all the earth is Mine'; and that they should possess the land as an inheritance (Ex. 19:5, 6; 23:30; Deuteronomy 15:4). Based upon this promise, and corresponding with the Divine election and favor, is the law which God gave to His people. As He had chosen and redeemed them so that they were to be a holy people, and to walk before Him, even as in the Ten Commandments the gospel of election and redemption came first: 'I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of Egypt.' Hence this covenant or dispensation, although it was a covenant, not of grace and Divine gifts and enablings, but of works, was connected with and based upon redemption, and it was dedicated, as the apostle emphatically says, not without blood.

"Both the book, or record of the covenant, and all the people, were sprinkled with the blood of typical sacrifices. For without blood is no remission of sins, and the promises of God can only be obtained through atonement. But we know that this is a figure of the one great Sacrifice, and that therefore all the promises and blessings under the old dispensation, underlying and sustaining it, were through the prospective death of the true Mediator. When therefore the spiritual Israelite was convinced by the law of sin, both as guilt and as a condition of impurity and strengthlessness, he was confronted by the promise of the inheritance, which always was of grace, unconditional and sure, and in a righteous and holy manner through expiation."

Verse 19. The one made use of for the dedication of the covenant was Moses. On God's part he was immediately called unto this employment: Exodus 3. On the part of the people, he was desired and chosen to transact all things between God and them,

because they were not able to bear the effects of His immediate presence: Exodus 19:19, Deuteronomy 5:22-27; and this choice of a spokesman on their part, God approved (verse 27). Thus Moses became in a general way a "mediator" between God and men in the giving of the law (Gal. 3:19). Thereby we are shown that there can be no covenant between God and sinful men, but in the hands of a Mediator, for man has neither meetness, merits, nor ability to be an undertaker of the terms of God's covenant in his own person.

Moses spake "every precept unto the people." This intimates the particular character of the Old Testament. It consisted primarily of commandments of obedience (Eph. 2:15), promising no assistance for the performance of them. The "new testament" is of another nature: it is one of promises, and although it also has precepts requiring obedience, yet is it (as a covenant) wholly founded in the promise, whereby strength and assistance for the performance of that obedience are given to us. Moses' reading "every precept unto the people" emphasizes the fact that all the good things they were to receive by virtue of the covenant, depended on their observance of all that was commanded them; for a curse was denounced against every one that "continued not in all things written in the law to do them" (Deut. 27:26). Obviously, such a "covenant" was never ordained for the saving of sinners: its insufficiency for that end is what the apostle demonstrates in the sequel.

We are again indebted to the exposition of John Owen for much of the above, and now give in condensed form some of his observations on the contents of verse 19. Here, for the first time, was any part of God's Word committed to writing. This book of the law was written that it might be read to all the people: it was not to be restricted to the priests, as containing mysteries unlawful to be divulged. It was written and read in the language which the people understood and spake, which condemns Rome's use of the Latin in her public services. Again; God never required the observance of any rites or duties of worship, without a previous warrant from His Word. How thankful should we be for the written Word!

That which Moses performed on this occasion was to sprinkle the blood. Exodus 24:6 informs us that he took "half of the blood" and sprinkled it "on the altar" (on which was the book); the other half on the people. The one was God's part; the other theirs. Thereby the mutual agreement of Jehovah and the people was

indicated. Typically, this foreshadowed the twofold efficacy of Christ's blood, to make salvation God-wards and to save man-wards; or, to the remission of our sins unto justification, and the purification of our persons unto sanctification. The "scarlet wool," probably bound around the "hyssop" (which was a common weed), was employed as a sprinkler, as that which served to apply the blood in the basins upon the people; "water" being mixed with the blood to keep it fluid and aspersible. In like manner, the communication of the benefits of Christ's death unto sanctification, is called the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2). To avail us, the blood must not only be "shed," but "sprinkled."

The mingling of the "water" with the "blood" was to represent the "blood and water" which flowed from the pierced side of the Savior (John 19:34,35), the spiritual "mystery" and meaning of which is profound and blessed. In 1 John 5:6 the Holy Spirit has particularly emphasized the fact that the Christ came "by water and blood." He came not only to make atonement for our sins by His blood that we might be justified, but also to sprinkle us with the efficacy of His blood in the communication of the Spirit unto sanctification, which is compared unto "water": see John 7:38, 39, Titus 3:5. The application of the blood to the "book" of the covenant was an intimation that atonement could be made by blood for the sins against its precepts, and the application of the "water" to it told of its purity. The sprinkler pointed to the humanity of Christ, through which all grace is communicated to us: the "scarlet wool" speaking of His personal glory (Dan. 5:7 etc.), and the "hyssop," the meanest of plant-life (1 Kings 4:33), being a figure of His lowly outward appearance.

Verse 20. In these words Moses reminded Israel of the foundation of their acceptance of the covenant, which foundation was the authority of God requiring them so to do; the word "enjoined" also emphasized the nature of the covenant itself: it consisted principally not of promises which had been given to them, but of "precepts" which called for hearty obedience. By quoting here these words of Moses "this is the blood of the testament," the apostle proves that not only death, but a sacrificial death, was required in order to the consecration and establishment of the first covenant. The blood was the confirmatory sign, the token between God and the people of their mutual engagements in that covenant. Thus did

God from earliest times teach His people, by type and shadow, the supreme value of the blood of His Son. These words of Moses were plainly alluded to by the Savior in the institution of His "supper": "This is My blood of the new testament" (Matthew 26:28) i.e., this represents My blood, by the shedding of which the new testament is confirmed.

Verse 21. The apostle now reminds the Hebrews that, not only was the Old Testament itself dedicated with blood, but that also all the ways and means of solemn worship were purified by the same. His purpose in bringing in this additional fact was to prove that not only was the blood of Christ in sacrifice necessary, but also to demonstrate its efficacy in the removing of sins and thereby qualifying sinners to be worshippers of the most holy God. The historical reference here is to what is found in Leviticus 16:14, 16, 18. The spiritual meaning of the tabernacle's furniture being sprinkled with blood was at least twofold: first, in themselves those vessels were holy by God's institution, yet in the use of them by polluted men, they became defiled, and needed purging. Second, to teach the Israelites and us that, the very means of grace which we use, are only made acceptable to God through the merits of Christ's sacrifice.

What we have just sought to point out above, brings before us a most important and humbling truth. In all those things wherein we have to do with God, and whereby we approach unto Him, nothing but the blood of Christ and the Spirit's application of it unto our consciences, gives us a gracious acceptance with Him. The best of our performances are defiled by the flesh; our very prayers and repentances are unclean, and cannot be received by God except as we plead before Him the precious blood of Christ. "The people were hereby taught that, God could not be looked to for salvation, nor rightly worshipped, except faith in every case looked to an intervening blood. For the majesty of God is justly to be dreaded by us, and the way to His presence is nothing to us but a dangerous labyrinth, until we know that He is pacified towards us through the blood of Christ, and that this blood affords to us a free access. All kinds of worship are then faulty and impure until, Christ cleanses them by the sprinkling of His blood . . . If this thought only came to our mind, that what we read is not written so much with ink as with the blood of Christ, that when the Gospel is preached, His sacred

blood distils together with the voice, there would be far greater attention as well as reverence on our part" (John Calvin).

Verse 22. "By the law" signifies "according unto the law," that is, according to its institution and rule, in that way of faith and obedience which the people were obligated unto. This has been shown by the apostle in the verses preceding. His design being to prove both the necessity for the death of Christ and the efficacy of His blood unto the purging of sins, whereof the legal institutions were types. The qualifying "almost" takes into consideration the exceptions of "fire" (Num. 31:23) and "water" (Lev. 22:6, 7, etc.): but let it be carefully noted that these exceptions were of such things as wherein the worship of God was not immediately concerned, nor where the conscience was defiled; they were only of external pollutions, by things in their own nature indifferent, having nothing of sin in them; yet were they designed as warnings against things which did defile. The "almost" also takes note of the exception in Leviticus 5:11.

The last clause of verse 22 enunciates an axiom universally true, and in every age. The curse of the law was, and still is, "the soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). But whereas there is no man "that sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20), God, in His grace, provided that there should be a testification of the remission of sins, and that the curse of the law should not be immediately executed on them that sinned. This He did by allowing the people to make atonement for those sins by the blood of sacrifices: Leviticus 17:11. Thereby God made known two things. First, to the Israelites that, by the blood of animals there should be a political or temporal remission of their sins granted, so that they should not die under the sentence of that law which was the rule of government over their nation. Second, that a real spiritual and eternal forgiveness should be granted unto faith in the sacrifice of Christ, which was represented by the slain animals. The present application of this verse is that, no salvation is possible for any soul that rejects the sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 9:23-28

Chapter 44 - The Great Sacrifice

Our present passage is so exceeding full that it is expedient we should reduce our introductory remarks. Perhaps about all it is necessary to say is, that here in Hebrews the apostle is treating of the priestly ministry of Christ, and demonstrating the immeasurable superiority of His sacerdotal functions over those of the legal priests. In the verses which are now to be before us, the apostle makes a definite application of that which has been treated of in the preceding section. A contrast is now drawn between the types and their Antitype. Therein we are shown that inasmuch as the Great Sacrifice which Christ offered unto God was the substance of all the Old Testament shadows, it was efficacious, all-sufficient, final.

In Hebrews 9:1-10 a declaration is made of sundry types and shadows of the law. In Hebrews 9:11-28 a manifestation of the accomplishment of them is seen in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. In this second section we are shown the excellency of Christ's priesthood in the effecting of those things and the securing of those blessings which Aaron and his sacrificing of animals could not effect and secure. First, the affirmation is made that Christ has entered into the true tabernacle, Heaven itself; that He did so on the ground of His own infinitely meritorious blood, the value of which is evidenced by the fact that it has "obtained eternal redemption" (verses 11,12). Second, confirmation of this is then made: inasmuch as the blood of beasts purified the flesh, much more can the blood of Christ purge the conscience (verses 13,14). Moreover the Mediatorial office which Christ undertook guaranteed our salvation (verse 15). So too the validity of the covenant-testament insured the same (verses 16, 17); as also the types pledged it (verses 19-22).

In Hebrews 9:23 (which properly belonged to our last section) the apostle concludes the main point he has been discussing, namely, that the typical things being purged with animal's blood, there must needs be a more excellent way of purifying and consecrating heavenly things, and that was by the precious blood of

the incarnate Son of God Himself. Having established this fact, he now returns to the other points of difference between the legal priests and Christ. Those priests entered only an earthly tabernacle, but Christ has gone into Heaven itself (verses 24, 25). The entrance of Israel's high priest into the holy of holies was repeated year by year, but Christ entered once for all (verses 25, 26). This is confirmed by the fact that men die but once, still less could the God-man suffer death repeatedly (verses 27, 28). Hence the blessed issue to all who rest upon the Great Sacrifice is, that He shall appear unto them "without sin unto salvation" (verse 28).

"Therefore (it was) necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (verse 23). The opening word denotes that a conclusion is now drawn from the premises just established, a conclusion which has respect unto both parts of the assertion made. In this verse the apostle brings to a head, or sums up, his previous argument concerning the typical purification of all things under the law, and the spiritual purification which has been effected by the sacrifice of Christ. "The general principle involved in these words is, plainly, that in expiation the victim must correspond in dignity to the nature of the offenses expiated, and the value of the blessings secured. Animal blood might expiate ceremonial guilt and secure temporary blessings, but in order to secure the expiation of moral guilt and the attainment of eternal blessings, a nobler victim must bleed" (John Brown).

"Therefore necessary (it was)": the reference is both to the type and the Antitype. It was so from God's institution and appointment. There was nothing in the nature of the typical objects themselves which demanded a purgation by sacrifice, but, inasmuch as God designed to foreshadow heavenly things by them, it was requisite that they should be purged with blood. Likewise, inasmuch as God ordained that the heavenly things should be purified, it was necessary that a superior sacrifice should be made, for the typical offerings were altogether inadequate to such an end. Such "necessity" was relative, and not absolute, for God was never under any compulsion. His infinite wisdom deemed such a method fitting and suited to His glory and the good of His elect.

The "patterns" or "figures" (verse 23) were the things which the apostle had been treating of, namely, the covenant, the book, the

people, the tabernacle and all its vessels of ministry. The "things in the heavens" were the everlasting covenant, the Church, and its redemption by Jesus Christ. The "heavenly things" had been designed in the mind of God in all their order, causes, beauty, and tendency unto His own glory, from all eternity; but they were "hid" in Himself (Eph. 3:8-10). Of these was God pleased to grant a typical resemblance, a shadowy similitude, an earthly adumbration, in the calling of Israel, His covenant with them, and the appointing of the tabernacle with its priesthood. By this means He deigned to instruct the early Church, and in their conformity to that typical order of things did their faith and obedience consist; the spiritual meaning of which the Old Testament saints did, in measure, understand (Ps. 119:18).

"The heavenly things." "By heavenly things, I understand all the effects of the counsel of God in Christ, in the redemption, salvation, worship, and eternal glory of the Church; that is, Christ Himself in all His offices, with all the spiritual and eternal effects of them on the souls and consciences of men, with all the worship of God by Him according unto the Gospel. For of all these things, those of the law were the patterns. God did in and by them give a representation of all these things" (John Owen). More specifically Christ Himself and His sacrifice were typified by the legal rites. So also all the spiritual blessings which His mediation has secured are "heavenly things": see John 3:12, Ephesians 1:3, Hebrews 3:1. The Church too (Phil. 3:20) and Heaven itself as the abode of Christ and His redeemed are included (John 14:1-3). But here a difficulty presents itself: how could such objects as those be said to be "purified"?

Of all the things mentioned above not one of them is capable of real purification from uncleanness excepting the Church, that is, the souls and consciences of its members. Yet the difficulty is more seeming than real. The term "purification" has a twofold sense, namely, of external dedication unto God and internal purification, both of which are, generally included in the term "sanctification" as it is used in Scripture. Thus, the covenant, the book of the covenant, the tabernacle, and all its vessels were "purified" in the first sense, that is, solemnly dedicated unto God and His service. In like manner were all the "heavenly things" themselves "purified." Christ was consecrated, dedicated unto God in His own blood: John 17:19,

Hebrews 2:10, etc. Heaven itself was dedicated to be an habitation forever unto the mystical body of Christ, in perfect peace with the angels who never sinned: Ephesians 1:10, Hebrews 12:22-24.

Yet there was also an internal "purification" of most of these "heavenly things." The souls and consciences of the members of the Church were really cleansed, purified and sanctified with an inward and spiritual purification: Ephesians 5:25,26, Titus 2:14. It has been "washed" in the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5) and is thereby cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:7). And Heaven itself, was in some sense purified—as the tabernacle was, because of the sins of the people in whose midst it stood (Lev. 16:16). When the angels apostatized, sin entered Heaven itself, and therefore was not pure in the sight of God (see Job 15:15). And upon the sin of man, a breach was made, enmity ensued, between the holy angels above and fallen men below; so that Heaven was no meet place for an habitation unto them both, until they were reconciled, which was only accomplished in the sacrifice of Christ (Eph. 1:10, Colossians 1:20).

One other detail needs to be considered: "But the heavenly things with better sacrifices." It is the use of the plural number here in connection with the sacrifice of Christ which has occasioned difficulty to some. It is a figure of speech known as an "enallage," the plural being put for the singular by way of emphasis. It is so expressed because the great sacrifice not only confirmed the signification, virtue, and benefits of all others, but exceeded in dignity, design and efficacy all others. Again; under the law there were five chief offerings appointed unto Israel: the burnt, the meal, the peace, the sin, the trespass (see Leviticus 1-5), and in Christ's great Sacrifice we have the antitype of all five, and hence His has superseded theirs. Thus, the plural, "sacrifices" here emphasizes the one offering of Christ, expresses its superlative excellency, and denotes that it provides the substance of the many shadows under the law.

If the reader will read straight on through Hebrews 9:18-23 he will then be in a position to appreciate the lovely sequel which is recorded in Exodus 24:8-11. A most glorious type was that. There we have a scene for which there is nothing approaching a parallel on all the pages of inspiration until the incarnation of the Son of God be reached. What we have there in Exodus 24 might well be termed the Old Testament Mount of Transfiguration. There we see not only

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, but also seventy "elders" (representatives of the people) in the very presence of God, perfectly at ease, eating and drinking there. The key-word to that marvelous incident is the "Then" at the beginning of verse 9, which brings out the inestimable value of the blood which had been sprinkled, and shows the grand privilege which it had procured, even making possible communion with God. The antitype of this is presented in Hebrews 10:22.

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (verse 24). The opening "For" denotes that a further reason is being advanced to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's sacrifice over those which were offered under the law. In verse 23 this was shown by its power to "purify" better objects than the typical offerings could dedicate or cleanse. Here the proof is drawn from the place which Christ entered after He had offered Himself a sacrifice unto God, namely, into Heaven itself. That which was the peculiar dignity of the high priest of Israel, and wherein the principal discharge of his duty did consist, was that he entered that sacred abode where the typical and visible representation of the presence of God was made. The antitype of this is what is here before us.

"For Christ." The Mediator is again denominated by His official title. In addition to our notes thereon under verse 14, we may point out that this title "The Anointed" imports three things. First, the offices or functions which the Son of God undertook for the salvation of His people. These were three in number and each was foreshadowed of old: the prophetic (1 Kings 19:16, Psalm 105:15), the priestly (Lev. 8:12,30; Psalm 133:2), the kingly (1 Sam. 10:1, 16:13). Second, the right which He has to undertake those functions: He who "anointed" Christ was the Father (Acts 10:38), thereby appointing and authorizing Him (Heb. 5:5). Third, His ability to perform those functions whereunto He was anointed: therefore did He declare "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach" etc. (Luke 4:18). That expression "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me" referred to that Divine endowment which had been conferred upon Him: cf. John 3:34.

"For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, the figures of the true." The negative is first expressed in

order to emphasize the contrast which follows. Three things are here said of respect to its institution, it was the "holy of holies," and that, because it had been dedicated as the chamber where the special pledges of God's presence were given. Second, as to its fabric, though framed by Divine command, it was but of human workmanship, "made with hands." Third, as to its principal end or design, it was a resemblance or figure of heavenly things. From the Sept. translation of "holy of holies" by "the holy places," it seems that they used the plural number to supply the lack in the Greek language of a suitable superlative.

"But into Heaven itself." This entrance of Christ into the celestial Sanctuary is to be distinguished from His entering "once into the holy place" of verse 12. In our exposition of that verse we sought to show at some length that the reference there is to what took place immediately after the Savior expired upon the cross, when, in fulfillment of the type of Leviticus 16:14, He appeared before the Father to present to Him the memorial of His completed satisfaction. Aaron's entrance into the holy of holies was not for the purpose of making atonement—that was effected outside (Lev. 16:11)—but to present to God an atonement already accomplished. Nor could Aaron's passing within the veil, clad only in his "linen" garments (Lev. 16:4 and contrast Exodus 28:2—etc.), possibly be a figure of Christ's triumphant admission into heaven with all the jubilation belonging to a coronation day. We must constantly distinguish between Christ as the antitype of Aaron, and Christ as the antitype of Melchizedek. Aaron pointed to nothing after Christ's resurrection; Melchizedek did. The "once" of Hebrews 9:12 emphasizes the finality of Christ's sacrifice. His "entrance" here in Hebrews 9:24 was for the purpose of intercession, which is continuous: Hebrews 7:25.

The entrance of our royal High Priest into heaven was necessary for rendering His sacrifice effective in the application of the benefits of it to the Church. As John Owen pointed out, the entrance of Christ into heaven on His ascension, may be considered two ways. "1. As it was regal, glorious and triumphant; so it belonged to His kingly office, as that wherein He triumphed over all the enemies of the Church: see it described in Ephesians 4:8-10 from Psalm 68:18. Satan, the world, death and hell being conquered, and all power committed to Him, He entered triumphantly into heaven.

So it was regal. 2. As it was sacerdotal. Peace and reconciliation being made by the blood of the cross, the covenant being confirmed, eternal redemption obtained, He entered as our High Priest into the holy place, the temple of God above, to make His sacrifice effectual to His Church, and to apply the benefits of it thereunto."

Christ entered Heaven as the great High Priest of His Church, as the Mediator of the new covenant, as the "Forerunner" of His people (Heb. 6:20), as their "Advocate" (1 John 2:1), and the "Firstborn of many brethren." His design in so doing was "to appear in the presence of God for us." This He does "now," at the present season, and always. What the typical priest did was of no continuance. But this "now" is expressive of the whole season and duration of time from the entrance of Christ into heaven to the consummation of all things. Absolutely, His entrance into Heaven had other ends in view (John 17:5, Hebrews 1:3—"upholding" etc.), but to appear before God for His people as their High Priest, was the only end or object of His entering Heaven, considered as God's "Temple," where is the "throne of grace." How this manifests Christ's full assurance of the success of His undertaking, His complete discharge from all that guilt which had been imputed to Him. Had He not made a full end of our sins, He could not have appeared with confidence as our Surety in the presence of God!

"To appear in the presence of God for us." This is an act of His sacerdotal office. Not only is it our High Priest who does so "appear," but He doth so as the High Priest of His Church. Nevertheless, it is such an act as necessarily implies the offering of Himself as a sacrifice for sin antecedent thereto, for it was with the blood of the atoning sacrifice that Aaron entered into the holy place (Lev. 16) as the head and representative of the people. In this appearance Christ presents Himself to God "as a lamb that had been slain" (Rev. 5:6)! It is that which gives validity and efficacy to His "appearing." The word "appear" is a forensic one, as of an Attorney before the Judge. He has gone there to seek from God and dispense to His people those blessings which He purchased for them. He has gone there to plead the infinite merits of His sacrifice, as a permanent reason why they should be saved: Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25. This supplies the great testimony to the continuance of Christ's love, care and compassion toward the Church: it is their interests which He promotes.

"Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others" (verse 25). In this verse the apostle does two things: meets an objection which might be made, and continues to demonstrate the superior excellency of the Great Sacrifice. The objection could be framed thus: If Aaron's entrance into the holy of holies was a type of Christ's entering heaven, then must He, like the legal high priest, enter oft. This the apostle here denies. Such a conclusion by no means follows, in fact, is utterly erroneous. God did not require this from Christ, there was no need of it, and, as he shows in the next verse, it was impossible that He should.

Such is the absolute perfection of the one offering of Christ, that it stands in need of, that it will admit of, no repetition in any kind. Therefore does the apostle declare that if it be despised or neglected, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26). This absolute perfection of the one offering of Christ arises from, first, the dignity of His person: Acts 20:28. It was the God-man who obeyed, suffered and died: nothing superior, nothing equal, could again be offered. Second, from the nature of the sacrifice itself. In the internal gracious workings of Christ, grace and obedience could never be more glorified than they had been by Immanuel Himself. So too, in the punishment He underwent: He suffered to the full, the whole curse of the law; hence, any further offering or atonement would be highly blasphemous. Third, from the love of the Father unto Him and delight in Him. In His one offering God was well pleased, and in it He rests. Hence the impossibility of any repetition—condensed from John Owen.

"Nor yet that He should offer Himself often." In these positive and pointed words the Holy Spirit has plainly anticipated and repudiated the blasphemous practice of the Papists, who in their daily "mass" pretend to sacrifice Christ afresh, and by their "priests" present Him as an offering to God, claiming that the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the real flesh and blood of Christ. Therefore are they guilty of the unspeakably dreadful sin of crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:6), for by their pretended "real sacrifice of Christ" they, through their daily repetition of it, deny its sufficiency and finality (Heb. 10:2), degrading it below that of the annual atonement of Israel, which was made by the blood of beasts.

"As the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others." On these words William Gouge beautifully pointed out that, "Herein we have an evidence of God's tender respect to man in sparing his blood. Though man were ordained a priest to typify Christ's priesthood, though man in that function were to appear before God, though he were to bear their names, yea, and their sins (Ex. 28:38), all of which Christ did, yet when it came to the shedding of his blood, as Christ did His, God spared him, and accepted the blood of beasts, as He accepted the ram for Isaac (Gen. 22:13). How this magnifies God's love to us, who was so tender of man, and yet spared not His own Son (Rom. 8:32)!"

"For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (verse 26). This verse consists of two parts. First, a reason is given confirming the assertion made in verse 25: had Christ been obliged to "offer Himself often" to God, then must He have "suffered" afresh "from the foundation of the world," that is, died afresh in each generation of human history. Second, a confirmation of that reason taken from the appointment of God: only once, and that in the fullness of time, did Christ come to earth to be a sacrifice for the sins of His people. Thus the apostle exposes the gross absurdity of the objection he met in verse 25: to admit that, would be to say Christ's blood had no more efficacy than that which the Jewish high priest offered.

The force of the apostle's argument rests upon two evident suppositions. First, that the "offering" (verse 25) and "suffering" (verse 26) of Christ are inseparable. It was in and by His suffering that the Lord Jesus offered Himself unto God, and that because He was Himself both the Priest and the Sacrifice. Aaron "offered" repeatedly, yet he never once "suffered," for he was not the sacrifice itself. It was the bullock which was slain, that suffered. But Christ being both Priest and Sacrifice could not "offer" without "suffering," and herein does the force of the argument principally consist. The very especial nature of Christ's offering or sacrifice, which was by the shedding of His blood in death, precluded a repetition thereof.

Second, the apostle's argument here is also built on the fact that there was a necessity for the expiation of the sin of all that were to be saved from the foundation of the world. Sin entered the world immediately after it was founded, by the apostasy of our first

parents. Notwithstanding, numbers of sinners, as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and the spiritual remnant in Israel had their sins pardoned and were eternally saved; yet no sacrifice which they offered could remit moral guilt or redeem their souls. No; their salvation was also effected by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. Hence it follows unavoidably that unless the merits of His own one offering extended unto the taking away of all their sins, then either He must have suffered often, or they perish. Contrariwise, seeing that elect sinners were saved through Christ "from the foundation of the world," much more will the virtues of the Great Sacrifice extend unto the end of the world.

"But now," not at the beginning of human history; "once," that is, once for all, never to be repeated; "in the end of the world," or in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4). This expression "end of the world" or more literally, "consummation of the ages" is here used antithetically from "since the foundation of the world" which usually has reference to the first entrance of sin into the world. and God's dispensation of grace in Christ thereon; as "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4, etc.) expresses eternity and God's counsels therein. The Divine distinctions of time with respect to God's grace toward His Church, may be referred to three general heads: that before the law, during the law, and since the incarnation of Christ unto the end of the world. This last season, absolutely considered, is called the "fullness of times" (Eph. 1:10), when all that God had designed in the dispensation of His grace was come to a head, and wherein no alteration should be made till the earth was no more.

"Hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." He "appeared" here on earth (the Greek word is quite different from the one used in verse 24): of old He had been obscurely shadowed forth in types, but now He was "manifest in flesh" (1 Tim. 3:10). The end or purpose of this appearing of Christ was to "put away sin"—the Greek word is a very strong one, and is rendered "disannuling" in Hebrews 7:18. Let it be carefully noted that this declaration is made only as it respects the Church of Christ. He made a complete atonement for all the sin of all His people, receiving its wages, expiating its guilt, destroying its dominion. The results are that, when God applies to the penitent believer the virtues of Christ's sacrifice, all condemnation is removed (Rom. 8:1), and its reigning power is destroyed (Rom. 6:14).

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (verses 27, 28). In these verses the apostle concludes his exposition of the causes, nature, designs and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ, wherewith the new covenant was dedicated and confirmed. In them a three-fold confirmation is made of the uniqueness and sufficiency of the Savior's atonement. First a comparison is drawn: pointed by the "as" and "so". Second a declaration is made as to why Christ died: it was to "bear the sins of many." Third, the resultant consequence of this is stated at the end of verse 28.

First, the comparison. This is between the death of men by the decretory sentence of God, and the offering of Christ by God's appointment. "It is appointed unto men once to die." That "appointment" was a penal one, being the sentence and curse of the broken law (Gen. 2:17), consisting of two parts: temporal death and eternal judgment. Death is not the result of chance, nor is it a "debt of nature," a condition to which man was made subject by the law of his creation. Death is something more than the result of physiological law: the same God who sustained Methuselah for well nigh a thousand years, would have sustained Adam's body for all eternity had he never fallen. Sinless angels are immortal. Death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). The case of Enoch and Elijah, Lazarus and that generation of believers alive on earth at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51), are only exceptions to the common rule, by mere acts of Divine sovereignty.

"After this the judgment." This, by the same Divine, unalterable constitution, is also "appointed" unto all: Acts 17:31. Death does not make an end of man, but is subservient to something else, which is equally certain and inevitable in its own season. As death leaves men, so shall judgment find them. This "judgment" is here opposed to the "salvation" of believers at the second appearing of Christ. It is the judgment of the wicked at the last great day: Romans 2:5. It will be the executing upon them of the condemnatory sentence of the law, the irrevocable curse of God—eternal banishment from Him, for indescribable and eternal torments to be inflicted upon them.

"So Christ was once offered." As the death-sentence, as a

penal infliction, was passed upon all of Adam's descendants (Rom. 5:12) viewed as criminals, as having broken the law in the person of their federal head, so Christ was "appointed" or sentenced by God, the Judge of all, to undergo the curse of the law, on the behalf and in the stead of those whom He represented. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sin of many." Here we see that deliverance from the curse which the wisdom and grace of God provided for His elect. The Anointed One, as the High Priest of His people, presented to God an all-sufficient and final satisfaction for all the sins of all who have been, from eternity, given to Him by the Father. Thus verses 27, 28 present the antithesis of the Law and the Gospel, as it relates to "men" indefinitely, and to the "many" specifically. The sins of many He "bare"—had imputed to Him, received the punishment of, and fully expiated—in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24).

"And unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." This needs to be interpreted in harmony with its context, and as furnishing the antitype of what is found in Leviticus 16. The word for "appear" here is not the one commonly used for the return of Christ—it means "to be seen." When Aaron disappeared within the veil, the people waited with eager expectation until he came out again to bless them. So Christ, having made atonement, and gone into heaven, shall yet re-appear and be seen by those who wait for Him. As men after death, must yet appear the "second time" in their body, to undergo condemnation therein; so Christ shall appear the second time, to bestow on God's elect eternal salvation.

"Unto them that look for Him:" that is, all the redeemed, the "many" whose sins He bore. Though the vision tarry, they wait for it (Hab. 2:3). Five things are included in this word "look for." First, the steadfast faith of His appearing, resting with implicit confidence on His promise in John 14:2, 3. Second, a real love unto it: 2 Timothy 4:8. Third, an ardent longing after it, so that they cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Fourth, a patient waiting for it, in the midst of many discouragements: James 5:7, 8. Fifth, a personal preparation for it: Matthew 25:10, Luke 12:35-37.

"Without (imputed) sin, unto salvation." Hereby Christ's second advent is contrasted from His first. When he appeared the first time, it was with "sin" upon Him (John 1:29) as the Surety of sinners. Therefore was He the Man of sorrows, and afflicted from

His youth up (Ps. 88:15). But He will re-appear in a very different state: as the Conqueror of sin and Satan, the Savior of His people, the King of kings and Lord of lords. At His return,

Hebrews 10:14

Chapter 45 - The Typical Sacrifice

The 10th chapter of our epistle has two main divisions: the first is occupied with a setting forth of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice unto those who believe, verses 1-20; the second is devoted to the making of a practical application of the doctrine of the first section unto faith, obedience, and perseverance, verses 21-39. The principal design of the Spirit therein is to exhibit the excellency and efficacy of Christ's satisfaction, and this, not so much God-wards, as saint-wards, showing the inestimable blessings which it has procured for the favored members of the household of faith. The method which the apostle was inspired to follow in carrying out this design, was to, once more, set in antithesis the typical sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation with the one Sacrifice of Christianity, contrasting the shadow with the Substance, and this, in order to bring out the inadequacy of the one and the sufficiency of the other to provide a perfect standing before God, with the resultant privilege of drawing near to Him as accepted worshippers.

Because the sacrifices under the old covenant were incapable, in and of themselves, to satisfy the claims of a holy God, they were also unable to meet the needs of those who brought them. Because that, of themselves, they could not make peace with God, neither could they give peace to the conscience of the offerer. Because they failed to make real atonement for sin, they could not cleanse the sinner. Therefore does the apostle point out that the Aaronic offerings were but "shadows," that the repetition of them intimated their insufficiency, that the fact of unexpiated sin was recalled to memory each time a victim was slain, and that inasmuch as it was merely the blood of beasts which was shed, it was impossible that such a medium or offering could either placate the wrath of God or procure His blessing upon those who presented such sacrifices.

The connection between Hebrews 10 and what immediately precedes is very blessed. In the closing verse of chapter 9 two things

are joined together: the cross of Christ and His second coming. And what intervenes between Calvary and the actual entrance into Glory of those who were there redeemed and reconciled to God? This: the Christian-life on earth, and it is this which is mainly in view in the closing chapters of our epistle. It is the present status, privileges, walk, discipline and responsibilities of the saints which are therein set forth. That which is exhibited in the first twenty verses of Hebrews 10 is the perfect standing before God which the regenerated believer now has, and his blessed privilege as a worshipper of entering in spirit within the Heavenly courts while waiting down here for the promised return of his Savior. Having shown in chapter 9 that atonement has been accomplished, that the heavenly places were purified when the Redeemer entered the Holiest, the Spirit now emphasizes the fact that the believer has been fitted to draw nigh unto God Himself as a purged and accepted worshipper.

In previous sections the apostle has contrasted the priests of the Levitical dispensation with our great High Priest, he has opposed the vastly different covenants or economies to which each belonged, he has shown the immeasurable superiority of Christ's one offering of Himself over the many sacrifices of old, he has placed in antithesis the respective "tabernacles" in which Aaron and Christ officiated. Each and all of these was designed to press upon the wavering Hebrews the deficiency of Judaism and the excellency of Christianity. Now he shows that not only are the two systems with all that pertains to them as different as a flickering candle and the shining of the sun, but that the privileges enjoyed by the individuals belonging to the one and the other are as widely separated as is light from darkness. The Mosaic system, as such, was neither able to impart permanent peace to the conscience nor give access into the presence of God, but the Satisfaction of Christ has procured these precious blessings unto those who flee to Him for refuge.

The order of thought which is followed in the first main division of our present chapter ought not to be difficult to grasp. First, we have an affirmation and demonstration of the deficiency of the legal sacrifices to "perfect" the worshipper: verses 1-4. Second, we have a manifestation and exemplification of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to "perfect forever" (verse 14) those for whom He made satisfaction unto God: verses 5-20. Thus the apostle proves

again the imperative need for the supplanting of all the unefficacious offerings of Judaism by the all-sufficient offering of Christ. In the developing of the first point, an assertion is made of the inadequacy of the Levitical sacrifices to expiate sin and meet the dire needs of the offerer (verse 1). A confirmation of the truth of this assertion is drawn from the frequency of their repetition (verse 2). It is shown that the annual typical propitiation was only a constant re-opening of the question of sin (verse 3). From these facts the inevitable conclusion is drawn that it was impossible for such sacrifices to remove sins.

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (verse 1). Three questions are suggested to the thoughtful reader of this verse. First, exactly what is the contrast pointed by "shadow" and "image"? Second, what is meant by the comers being made "perfect"? Third, why did God appoint sacrifices that were so unefficacious? These shall be our points of focus as we endeavor to expound this verse.

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come." The opening "For" intimates that what is introduced thereby is an inference drawn from what had previously been stated. Having shown that the sacrifice of Christ had met all the demands of God and had confirmed the new covenant, the apostle concludes from thence that, inasmuch as the Levitical sacrifices could not effect those ends which had been accomplished by Christ's, they must be taken out of the way. The "law" here is not to be restricted to the ceremonial, as the words "having a shadow" warn us; still less is it the moral law, which, absolutely considered, had no sacrifices belonging to it. No, the reference is to the whole of the Mosaic economy, or more specifically, to the covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai, with all the institutions of worship belonging thereto.

"Shadow is put first emphatically; only a shadow or outline of the substantial and eternal blessings promised. A shadow has no substance; but brings before the mind the form of the body from which it is projected! The 'image' itself is given to us in Christ, a full and permanent embodiment of the good things to come" (Adolph Saphir). We believe this presents the correct idea: it is

clearly borne out by Colossians 2:17, "which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." The apostle is there speaking of the same things as he treats of here in Hebrews 10:1: the Mosaic economy, with all its ordinances and institutions of worship, gave only an earthly adumbration or representation, and did not possess the substance, reality, or "body": that is found only in Christ Himself, to whom the Old Testament shadows pointed. A "shadow" gives a representation of a body, a more or less just one of its form and size, yet only an obscure and imperfect one—compare our remarks on Hebrews 8:5.

The "good things to come" (future, not when this epistle was written, but at the time that the Mosaic economy was instituted) has reference to all those blessings and privileges which have come to the church in consequence of the incarnation of Christ and the discharge of His office. Well might they be designated "good things," for there is no alloy or mixture of evil with them; other things are "good" relatively, but these things absolutely. The "image" or substance of them is found in Christ, and set forth in His Gospel: for a similar use of the term "image" cf. Romans 8:29. "This therefore is that which the apostle denies concerning the law. It had not the actual accomplishment of the promise of good things; it had not Christ exhibited in the flesh; it had not the true real sacrifice of perfect expiation: it represented these things; it had a shadow of them, but enjoyed not, exhibited not the things themselves. Herein was its imperfection and weakness, so that by none of its sacrifices could it make the Church perfect" (John Owen).

"Can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect." In these words we have the inference or conclusion for which the "For" at the beginning of the verse prepares us: if the law contained in it nothing better than a "shadow," it is obvious that its sacrifices could not possibly make perfect those who offered them. John Owen has most helpfully pointed out that the Greek word here rendered "continually" signifies "forever," occurring elsewhere in this epistle only in Hebrews 7:3, 10:12, 14 (Bagster's Interlinear gives "in perpetuity") and that it should be connected not with the clause preceding, but with the one following, thus: "the law by its sacrifices could not perfect forever, or unto the uttermost, the comers thereto."

Three things are affirmed in the second half of our verse.

First, the impotency of the "law" or old covenant, or Mosaic economy. It could never "make perfect." It could by no means, in no way do so; it was impossible that it should. This is stated so emphatically in order to remove from the minds of the Hebrews all expectations of perfection with Judaism. Second, that with respect unto which this impotency of the law is here ascribed was its "sacrifices," which was the very thing in which most of the Jews had chiefly placed their hopes. But not only is that affirmed of the sacrifices in general, but also in particular of the great sacrifice on the day of atonement, which was offered "year by year": if that was ineffectual, how much more so the minor offerings! Third, that wherein its impotency lay was its inability to "perfect" the "comers."

Concerning the meaning of "perfect" here, we would refer back to our exposition of Hebrews 7:11. For the benefit of those who do not have access to the August 1930 issue, we would point out that the term "perfect" is one of the key-words of this epistle, close attention needing to be paid to its contexts. It has to do more with relationship than experience. It concerns the objective side of things rather than the subjective. It looks to the judicial and vital aspect, more than to the practical. "Perfection" means the bringing of a thing to that completeness of condition designed for it. Doctrinally it refers to the producing of a satisfactory and final relationship between God and His people. It speaks of that unchanging standing in the favor and blessing of God which Christ has secured for His saints. See also our notes on Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 6:1.

That "perfection" which God requires is absolute conformity to His moral law, so that not only is there no guilt of transgression resting upon us, but a full, flawless, and rewardable obedience to our account. How impossible it was for the slaying of beasts to secure this is self-evident. The "comers thereunto" are defined in verse 2 as "the worshippers": it was those who made use of the Levitical sacrifices in the worship of God. This term "come" in the Hebrews' epistle has its root in the "bring" of Leviticus 1:2, the Hebrew word there signifying those who "draw nigh" with an oblation, coming thus to the altar. Though the slaying of beasts procured a temporary expiation, it did not secure an eternal forgiveness, it did not perfect "continually" or "for ever." Hence, the effect produced on the conscience of the offerer was only a transient one, for a sense of sin returned upon him, forcing him unto a repetition of the same

sacrifices, as the apostle declares in the next verse. This brings us to our third question: Why did God appoint unto Israel sacrifices so ineffectual?

Many answers might be returned to this question. Though the Levitical offerings failed to procure an eternal redemption, yet were they by no means useless and without value. First of all, they served to keep in the minds of Israel the fact that God is ineffably holy and will not tolerate evil. They were constantly reminded that the wages of sin is death. They were taught thereby that a constant acknowledgement of their sins was imperative if communion with the Lord was to be maintained. In the second place, by means of these types and shadows God was pointing out to them the direction from which true salvation must come, namely, in a sinless Victim enduring in their stead the righteous penalty which their sins called for. Thereby God instructed them to look forward in faith to the time when the Redeemer should appear, and the great Sacrifice be offered for the sins of His people. Third, there was an efficacy in the Old Testament sacrifices to remove temporal judgment, to give ceremonial ablution, and to maintain external fellowship with Jehovah. They who despised the sacrifices were "cut off" or excommunicated; but those who offered them maintained their place in the congregation of the Lord.

Ere passing on to the next verse let us seek to make practical application unto ourselves of what has been before us. In coming to God, that is, drawing nigh unto Him as worshippers, the first qualification in us is that we are legitimately assured of the perfect expiation (cancellation) of our sins. When this foundation is not laid in the soul and conscience, all attempts to approach God as worshippers are highly presumptuous, for no guilty person can stand before Him. To offer thanksgiving and praise to him before we know we have been forgiven and accepted by Him, is to repeat the high-handed sin of Cain. The very first things proposed to us in the Gospel are that we own our undone condition, judge ourselves unsparingly, turn from our sins, and appropriate to our deep need the grace of God as it is tendered to us in Jesus Christ. Only as the heart is truly contrite and faith lays hold of the atoning blood of the Lamb, is any sinner entitled to draw nigh unto the Holy One.

"For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more

conscience of sins" (verse 2). The contents of this verse enable us to grasp more clearly the particular aspects of Truth which our present chapter is dealing with. It is not so much what the sacrifices effected God-wards, as man-wards: it is their purifying effects upon the worshipper which is mainly in view. This is quite evident from the expressions "once purged" and "no more conscience of sins." In like manner, the principal thing in the verses which follow is the setting forth of what Christ's atonement has secured for His people: see verses 10, 14, 19.

"For then would they not have ceased to be offered?" "This verse is added as a proof of the reason concerning the impotency of the foresaid legal sacrifices. The reason was taken from the reiteration of those sacrifices, whereby it was made manifest that they could not make perfect. The argument may be framed thus: That which makes perfect ceaseth when it hath made perfect; but the sacrifices which were offered year by year, ceased not; therefore they could not have made perfect" (William Gouge). In reply it might be opposed: The repetition of the sacrifice was not through any inherent defect in it, but because the offerer had acquired fresh guilt; the offering expiated all sin up to the time it was offered, but new sins being committed, another sacrifice became necessary. Let us face this difficulty.

There was a defect in the sacrifices themselves, as will be seen more plainly when we reach verse 4; they were altogether inadequate for meeting the infinite demands of God, they were altogether insufficient to compensate for the wrong done to God's manifestative glory and could not repair the loss of His honor. None save a sacrifice which possessed intrinsic merits, having an infinite value, could make real and final satisfaction. That Sacrifice has been offered, and so perfect is it that it stands in no need of addition. The Atonement of Christ is of perpetual efficacy unto God, and is ever available to faith. No matter how often application be made unto it, its power never wanes and its preciousness never diminishes.

"Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins." The final words fix for us the meaning, or rather scope, of the "once purged" here. That sacrificial term may denote either (or both) the removal of the guilt of sin or the pollution thereof: the one is taken away by justification, the other by sanctification. The one is the effect of the sacerdotal actings of

Christ toward God, in making atonement for sin; the other is by the Spirit's application of the virtues of that Sacrifice to our souls and consciences, whereby they are cleansed, renewed, and changed. It is the former only which is before us here, namely, such a purging of sin as takes away its condemning power from the conscience on account of the guilt of it. But this the Levitical sacrifices failed to do, as the next verse shows.

"No more conscience of sins." This does not mean that the one who has been "purged" or justified has no further consciousness of sins, for no one is more painfully aware of them and of the indwelling "flesh" than is a regenerated soul. That is his great burden and sorrow. No, the one who is insensible to the evil and demerit of indwelling sin is a deluded soul: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Nor do the last words of Hebrews 10:2 in anywise intimate that there is no need for a Christian's being deeply exercised over his sins and that God does not require him to repent of and confess them, and make repeated application to the Throne of Grace for "mercy" through the sacrifice of Christ. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13): this holds good in every dispensation.

"No more conscience of sins" signifies freedom from an apprehensive or terrifying sense of what they deserved. It means complete deliverance from the fear of God's ever imputing them to us. It is the blessed recognition that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Faith has laid hold of the precious testimony of God unto the efficacy of the blood of Christ as having satisfied His every demand. If we really believe that the wages of sin were paid to our sinless Substitute, how can we be fearful that they will yet be paid to us! The word "conscience" is compounded from two words meaning "with knowledge," that is, a joint-knowledge of good and evil. Conscience is the eye of the soul, discerning right from wrong, yet is it dependent—as the eye is—on light. To and through the conscience God speaks as Light (1 John 1:5). When His light first breaks in and shows me what I am, I get a bad conscience; when it is purged by blood (through faith laying hold of its efficacy) I obtain a cleansed one.

It is important to observe that our verse does not say the

worshipper should have "no conscience of sins," but "no more conscience" of them. This confirms the idea that the "continually" ("for ever") of the previous verse is to be connected not with the "sacrifices," but with "perfect." It would be a great mistake to suppose that the Levitical sacrifices altogether failed to remove sins from before God: Leviticus 4:2, 31; 16:11, 22 show otherwise. Nor was it that those sacrifices failed to remove the load of conscious guilt from those who offered them: in such case we should never have read of them rejoicing before God. No, what the apostle is here insisting upon is that those sacrifices only gave peace of conscience pro tern: they were unable to lay a foundation for permanent rest and abiding peace.

But what of the sins of the Christian after he has been "purged" or justified? John 13:10 makes answer: "he that is washed (Greek, "has been bathed") needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." By the blood of Christ the Christian has been completely cleansed once for all, so far as the judicial and eternal consequences of sin are concerned: "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), thereby providing for them such stable peace and consolation as that they need not a fresh sacrifice to be made for them day by day. The Gospel makes known how those who sin every day may enjoy peace with God all their days, and that is by a daily confession of sins to God (judging themselves for them and truly repenting of them) and a daily appropriation to themselves of the cleansing power of Christ's precious blood for the defilements of their daily walk.

"But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again of sins every year" (verse 3). The first word of this verse denotes the nature of the argument insisted upon. In the second verse it had been pointed out that, had the worshippers been legally perfected they would have had no more conscience of sins; but, says the apostle, it was not so with them: God appointed nothing in vain, and He had not only prescribed the repetition of those sacrifices, but also that in each offering there should be a "remembrance" made of sin, as of that which was to be expiated. It was by God's own institution (Lev. 16:21, 22) that there should be an "express remembrance," or a remembrance expressed by acknowledgement: See Genesis 41:9; 42:21. By an appeal to this patent fact did the apostle confirm what had been declared in verses 1, 2.

But at this point a real difficulty confronts us: the first four verses of this chapter are designed as a background to bring out more plainly the glorious truth presented in what follows: in other words, a contrast is pointed by showing what the Levitical sacrifices could not procure, Christ's has—"By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (verse 14). Yet, notwithstanding, the fact remains that Christians ought not only once a year, but every day, call to remembrance and penitently confess the same, yea, our Lord Himself has taught us to pray every day for the pardon of our sins: Luke 11:3, 4. Wherein, then, lies the difference between the Levitical sacrifices and Christ's, seeing that after both of them there is equally a remembrance of sin again to be made? Though the problem seems intricate, yet is its solution simple.

Those under the Mosaic economy confessed their sins preparatory for and in order to a new atonement of them; not so the Christian. Our "remembrance" and confession respects only the application of the efficacy and virtue of that perfect Atonement which has been made once for all. With them, their remembrance looked to the curse of the law which was to be answered, and the wrath of God which was to be appeased; with us, that which is involved is the imparting of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice unto our conscience, whereby we have assured peace with God. Confession of sin is as necessary under the new covenant as under the old, but with an entirely different end in view: it is not as a part of the compensation for the guilt of it, nor as a means of pacifying the conscience so that we may still go on in sin; but to fill us with self-abasement, to induce greater watchfulness against sin, to glorify God for the mercy available, and to obtain a sense of His pardon in our own souls.

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (verse 4). Here the apostle brings to a head that which has been set forth in the preceding verses: seeing that the law contained only a "shadow" of real redemption and could not perfect unto perpetuity the worshippers (verse 1), and seeing that "conscience of sins" remained (verse 2) as was evidenced by the very design of the annual and typical propitiation (verse 3), it therefore inevitably followed that it was "impossible" such sacrifices should "take away" or properly expiate sins. Such, we take it, is the force of the opening "For" here.

There is a necessity of sin being "taken away," both from before the Governor of the world and from the conscience of His people. But this, the blood of beasts could not effect. Why not? First and foremost because God had not instituted animal sacrifices for that purpose. All the virtues and efficacy of the ordinances of Divine worship depend upon the end unto which God has instituted them. The blood of animals offered in sacrifice was designed of God to represent the way in which sin was to be removed, but not by itself to effect it. Nor did it comport with the Divine will and wisdom that it should. God had declared His severity against sin, with the necessity of its punishment to the glory of His righteousness and sovereign rule over His creatures. A most solemn demonstration of this was made at Sinai, in the giving of the fiery law: Exodus 19:16-24: but what consistency had there been between that and the satisfying of God's awful justice, and the removal of sin by such beggarly means as that of the blood of bulls and goats? In such case there had been no manner of proportion manifested between the infinite demerits of sin and the feeble instruments of its expiation.

It was impossible for any mere creature to satisfy the demands of the all-mighty Governor of the universe. The highest angel could never have adequately made compensation for the tremendous wrong which sin had done God, nor repair the loss of His manifestative glory; yea, had not Christ's sinless and holy humanity—in which He performed the stupendous work of redemption—been united in His deity, that could not have met the claims of God nor merited eternal salvation for His people. Far less could the blood of beasts vindicate the honor of an infinite Majesty, pacify His righteous wrath, meet the requirements of His holy law, nor even cleanse the conscience and heart of man. "The blood of bulls and goats were external, earthly, and carnal things; but to take away sin was an internal, Divine, and spiritual matter" (William Gouge). Though the Levitical sacrifices possessed, by God's institution, an efficacy to remove an outward and ceremonial defilement, they could not take away an inward and moral pollution.

This 4th verse enunciates and illustrates a deeply important principle which exposes the great error of Ritualists. As we have pointed out above, all ordinances of Divine worship derive their value from God's institution: they can only effect that which He has appointed, they have in them no inherent efficacy. While they may

usefully represent spiritual truths, they have no spiritual virtue of their own, and cannot of and by themselves secure spiritual results. The offerings of Judaism had a Divinely appointed meaning and value, but they could not take away sins. The same holds good of the two ordinances of Christianity. Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been ordained of God. They have a symbolical significance. They represent blessed realities. But they have no inherent power either to remove sin, regenerate souls, or impart spiritual blessing. It is only as faith looks beyond the symbol to Him who is symbolized that the soul receives blessing.

Ere closing, perhaps we ought to anticipate a question which is likely to have arisen in the minds of the readers. In view of what is affirmed in the verses which have been before us, are we to conclude that none of the Old Testament saints had a perfect and permanent standing before God? No, indeed, for such an inference would manifestly clash with many plain Old Testament passages and with the promises which the Church had under the old covenant. The apostle is not here denying absolutely that no one had spiritual access to God and real peace of conscience before Him, but is merely affirming that such blessings could not be secured by means of the Levitical sacrifices. But those who belonged to the "remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5) had faith given them to look beyond the shadow to the Substance: see Job 19:25; Psalm 23:6; Song of Solomon 2:16; Isaiah 12:2; Daniel 12:2, etc.

Hebrews 10:5-7

Chapter 46 - The Divine Incarnation

In the first four verses of our present chapter the apostle was moved to press upon the Hebrews the insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifices to bring about those spiritual and eternal effects that were needed in order for poor sinners being fitted to stand before God as accepted worshippers. His design in so doing was to pave the way for setting before them the dire need for and the absolute sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. First, he affirmed that the old covenant provided a "shadow" of the future "good things," but not the substance itself (verse 1). Under the Mosaic economy men were taught that ceremonial guilt, acquired through breaking the ceremonial law, severed from ceremonial fellowship with God, and that the offering of the prescribed sacrifices procured ceremonial forgiveness (Lev. 4:20) and restored to external fellowship, and thereby temporal punishment was averted. In this way there was adumbrated in a lower sphere what Christ's sacrifice was to accomplish in a higher.

That there was an insufficiency to the typical sacrifices was plainly intimated by their frequent repetition (verse 2). Had the offerer been so "purged" as to have "no more conscience of sins," that is, had his moral guilt been fully and finally expiated, then no further offering had been needed. Even though God's people continually commit fresh sins a new sacrifice is not required. Why? Because the one perfect Sacrifice has made complete satisfaction unto God, and is of perpetual efficacy before Him: therefore is it ever available to penitence and faith, for application unto fresh pardons. But no such sufficiency pertained to the typical sacrifices: a temporary and outward cleansing they could effect, but nothing more. "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God" (Jer. 2:22).

There was no proportion between the infinite demerits of sin, the demands of God's justice, and the slaying of beasts. Whether the

matter be viewed in the light of God's nature, of man's soul, or of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, it was obvious that the blood of bulls and goats could not possibly make atonement (verse 4). Nor was this fact altogether unknown in Old Testament times: did not one of Jehovah's prophets declare, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves that are a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic. 6:6, 7)! But later this light was lost to the carnal Jews, who, like the darkened Gentiles, came to believe that a real and efficacious atonement was made by the offering of animal blood unto God.

"It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices" (Heb. 9:23). Yet patent as this now is to any renewed mind, it was an exceedingly difficult matter to convince the Jews of it. The Levitical sacrifices were of Divine institution and not of human invention. Their fathers had offered them for fifteen centuries; thus, to affirm at this late date that they were set aside by God made a big demand upon their faith, their prejudices, their affections. Nevertheless, the logic of the apostle was invincible, the force of his arguments unanswerable. But it is blessed to observe that he did not rest his case here; instead, he referred once more to an authority against which no appeal could be allowed.

As we have passed from chapter to chapter, and followed the inspired unfolding of the pre-eminency of Christianity over Judaism, we have been deeply impressed by the fact that, at every crucial point, proof has been furnished from the Old Testament Scriptures. When affirming the excellency of the Son over angels (Heb. 1:4), appeal was made to Psalm 97:7 (Heb. 1:6). When insisting on the exaltation of the humbled Messiah over all the works of God's hands (Heb. 2:6-9), Psalm 8:4-6 was cited. When declaring the superiority of Christ's priesthood over Aaron's, Psalm 110:4 was given in substantiation of it (Heb. 6:20). When pointing out the superseding of the old covenant by the new, Jeremiah 31:31 was shown to have taught that very thing (Heb. 8:8). And now that the all-important point has been reached for showing the imperative necessity of the

abolition of the Levitical offerings, another of their own Scriptures is referred to as announcing to the Hebrews this identical fact. How all this demonstrates the inestimable worth and the final authority of Holy Writ!

"Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God" (verses 5-7). These verses contain a direct quotation from the 40th Psalm, which, equally with the 2nd, 16th, 22nd, 10th, etc., was a Messianic one. In it the Lord Jesus is heard speaking, speaking to His Father; and well does it behoove us to give our utmost attention to every syllable that He here utters.

The citation which is here made from the Old Testament Scriptures is introduced with, "Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith." The precise force of the opening "Wherefore" is not easily determined: it seems to signify, In accord with the facts pointed out in the first four verses; or, in proof thereof, listen to the prophetic language of Christ Himself. John Owen suggested: 'It doth not give an account why the words following were spoken, but why the things themselves were so ordered and disposed.' The "Wherefore" is a logical particle intimating that by virtue of the impotency of the Old Testament sacrifices, Christ came not to offer those fruitless sacrifices, but to do the will of God in their room. The Mosaic worship, with all its complicated ritual, was superseded by something better coming in its stead. Christ took away the first, that He might establish the second.

The passage which is here before us calls for a whole book to be written thereon, rather than a single article: so blessed, so wondrous, so important are its contents. In it we behold the amazing grace and wisdom of the Father, the matchless love and obedience of the Son, and the federal agreement which was between the Father and the Son with reference to the work of redemption and the salvation of the Church. In it too we see demonstrated again the perfect harmony which exists between the old and the New Testament and the declaration of these things. In it we are taken back to a point before the foundation of the world, and are permitted to learn something of the august counsels of the Eternal Three. In it

we are shown the means which the Divine wisdom appointed for the carrying out of those counsels. It is both our duty and privilege to prayerfully inquire and diligently search into the mind of the Holy Spirit therein.

"Wherefore when He cometh into the world." The One who is here before us is the second person in the Holy Trinity. It is He who had been in the Father's delight from all eternity. It is none other than the One by whom and for whom all things were created "that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16); who is "over all, God blessed forever" (Rom. 9:5). This ineffably blessed and glorious One condescended not merely to behold, or even to send an ambassador, but to personally come into this world. And, wonder of wonders, He came here not "in the form of God," bearing all the manifested insignia of Deity, nor even in the appearance of an angel, as occasionally He did in Old Testament times; but instead, He came in "the form of a servant," and was actually "made under the law." May our hearts be truly bowed in wonderment and worship at this amazing and unparalleled marvel.

"When the fullness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4), when the sinfulness of man and his utter helplessness to extricate himself from his dreadful misery had been completely demonstrated; when the insufficiency of Judaism and the powerlessness of the Levitical sacrifices had been made manifest; then it pleased the Son to become incarnate, execute the eternal purpose of the Godhead, fulfill the terms of the everlasting covenant, make good the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perform that stupendous work which would bring an incalculable revenue of praise to the Triune God, glorify Him above all His other works, put away the sins of His people, and provide for them a perfect and everlasting righteousness which would entitle and fit them to dwell forever in the Father's House. So transcendent are these things that only those whom the Spirit of Truth deigns to illuminate and instruct are capable, in any measure, of apprehending and entering into their ineffable meaning and preciousness. May it please Him, in His sovereign grace, to shine now upon the hearts and understandings of both writer and reader.

"Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me." Here we behold the perfect intelligence of the Son

concerning the mind and will of the Father. In the eternal purpose of the Triune God, Christ, as Mediator had been "set up from everlasting" (Prov. 8:23). The Lord had "possessed Him," He was "by Him, as One brought up with Him" (Prov. 8:22, 30). As such, nothing was concealed from Him; all the counsels of Deity were made known to Him. Therefore did He declare, after His incarnation, "The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things" (John 5:20). An illustration of this fact is before us in our present passage.

"He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me." But here a difficulty presents itself: the Levitical sacrifices had been instituted by God Himself, how then could it be said that He willed them not? The solution is simple: the language here (as is not infrequently the case in Scripture) is to be taken relatively, and not absolutely. There was one real sense in which the Old Testament sacrifices were acceptable to God, and another in which they were not so. The reference here is not to the actual appointment of the sacrifices, for Hebrews 10:8 tells us they were "offered according to the law" which God had given to Israel. Nor is the reference to the obedience of the people concerning them during the Mosaic economy, for God both required and approved them at their hands. Nor is it that the apostle is merely speaking from the present viewpoint (as some have superficially supposed), i.e., that the sacrifices were no longer pleasing to Him. No, our text strikes much deeper: God willed not those sacrifices for the ends which He ordained the Sacrifice of Christ to effect.

"But a body hast Thou prepared Me." The first word of this clause serves to define the preceding one: the body of Christ is placed over against, substituted in the stead of, replaces, the Levitical offerings. Let the reader recall the whole context: there the Holy Spirit has shown the utter inadequacy of the blood of bulls and goats, the impossibility of its meeting the highest claims of God and the deepest need of sinners. God had not appointed animal sacrifices for those ends: He never took pleasure in them with reference thereto; according to the will of God they were altogether insufficient for any such purpose. From all eternity it was Christ, the "Lamb," who had been "foreordained" to make satisfaction unto God for His people (1 Pet. 1:20). The Levitical sacrifices were never designed by God as anything more than a temporary means to

shadow forth the great Sacrifice. This, the Mediator Himself was fully cognizant of from before the foundation of the world.

"But a body hast Thou prepared Me." The term "a body" is a synecdochial expression (a part put for the whole, as when we say a farmer has so many "head" of cattle, or a manufacturer employs so many "hands") of the whole human nature of Christ, consisting of spirit and soul and body. As to some of the reasons why the Holy Spirit here threw the emphasis on Christ's "body" rather than on His "soul" (as in Isaiah 53:10) we would humbly suggest the following. First, to emphasize the fact that the offering of Christ was to be by death, and this the body alone was subject to. Second, because the new covenant was to be confirmed by the offering of Christ, and this was to be by blood, which is contained in the body alone. Third, to make more evident the conformity of the Head to His members who were "partakers of flesh and blood." Fourth, to remind us that Christ's whole human nature (that "holy thing," Luke 1:35) was not a distinct person.

"But a body hast Thou prepared Me." The verb has a double force: the humanity of Christ was both foreordained and created by the Father. The first reference in the "prepared" here is the same as in Isaiah 30:33. "Tophet is ordained of old, for the king it is prepared"; "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9); "the vessels of mercy, which He hath afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:23). In His eternal counsels, God has resolved that the Son should become incarnate; in the everlasting covenant the Father had proposed and the Son had agreed that, at the appointed time, Christ should be made in the likeness of men. The second reference in the word "prepared" is to the actual creating of Christ's humanity, that it might be fitted for the work unto which it was designed.

"But a body hast Thou prepared Me." Commentators have needlessly perplexed themselves and their readers by discovering a discrepancy between these words and Psalm 40:6 which reads, "Mine ears hast Thou opened" or "dugged" (margin). Really, there is no discord whatever between the two expressions: one is figurative, the other literal; both having the same sense. They refer to an act of the Father towards the Son, the purpose of the action being designed to make Him meet to do the will of God in a way of obedience. The metaphor used by the Psalmist possessed a double significance.

First, the "ear" is that member of the body whereby we hear the commands we are to obey, hence nothing is more frequent in Scripture than to express obedience by hearing and hearkening. Here too the part is put for the whole. In His Divine nature alone, it was impossible for the Son, who was co-equal with the Father, to come under the law; therefore did He prepare for Him another nature, in which He could render submission to Him.

It is impossible that anyone should have ears of any use but by having a body, and it is through the ears that instruction unto obedience is received. It is to this the incarnate Son made reference when, in the language of prophecy, He declared, "He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" (Isa. 50:4, 5). Thus the figure used in Psalm 40:6 intimated that the Father did so order things toward the Messiah that He should have a nature wherein He might be free and able to be in subjection to the will of God; intimating, moreover, the quality of it, namely, in having ears to hear, which belong only to a "body."

The second significance of the figure used in Psalm 40:6 may be discovered by a comparison with Exodus 21:6, where we learn of the provision made by the law to meet the case of a Hebrew servant, who chose to remain in voluntary servitude rather than accept his freedom, as he might do, at the seventh year of release. "Mine ears hast Thou digged" announced the Savior's readiness to act as God's "Servant:" Isaiah 42:1, 53:11. Only it is to be duly noted that in Exodus 21:6 it is "ear," whereas in Psalm 40:6 it is "ears"—in all things Christ has the "pre-eminence!" There was never any devotion either to Master or Spouse which could be compared with His: there was (so to speak) an over-plus of willingness in Him. "A body hast Thou prepared Me" presents the same idea, only in another form: His human nature was assumed for the very purpose of being the vehicle of service. Christ came here to be the substance of all the Old Testament shadows, Exodus 21:1-6 not excepted. In becoming Man, the Son took upon Him "the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7).

"A body hast Thou prepared Me." "The origin of the salvation of the Church is in a peculiar manner ascribed unto the Father—His will, His grace, His wisdom, His good pleasure, His

love, His sending of the Son, are everywhere proposed as the eternal springs of all acts of power, grace and goodness, tending unto the salvation of the Church. And therefore doth the Lord Christ on all occasions declare that He came to do the Father's will, seek His glory, make known His name, that the praise of His grace might be exalted" (John Owen). It was by the Holy Spirit that the human nature of the Redeemer was created. His body was "prepared" not by the ordinary laws of procreation, but by the supernatural power of the third person of the Trinity working upon and within Mary. There is thus a clear allusion here to the Virgin-birth of the Lord Jesus.

"He prepared Him such a body, such a human nature, as might be of the same nature with ours, for whom He was to accomplish His work therein. For it was necessary that it should be cognate and allied unto ours, that He might be meet to act on our behalf, and to suffer in our stead. He did not form Him a body out of the dust of the earth, as He did that of Adam, whereby He could not have been of the same race of mankind with us; nor merely out of nothing, as He created the angels whom He was not to save (Heb. 2:14-16). He took our flesh and blood proceeding from the loins of Abraham. He so prepared it, as that it should be no way subject unto that depravation and pollution, that came on our whole nature by sin. This could not have been done, had His body been prepared by carnal generation—the way and means of conveying the taint of original sin, which befell our nature, unto all individual persons—for this would have rendered Him every way unmeet for His whole work of mediation (Heb. 7:26) . . . This body or human nature, thus prepared for Christ, was exposed unto all sorts of temptations from outward causes. But yet was it so sanctified by the perfection of grace, and fortified by the fullness of the Spirit dwelling therein, that it was not possible it should be touched with the least taint or guilt of sin" (John Owen).

Summing up this important point: though the actual operation in the production of our Savior's humanity was the immediate work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), nevertheless, the preparation thereof was also the work of the Father in a real and peculiar manner, namely, in the infinitely wise and authoritative contrivance of it, and so ordering of it by His counsel and will. The Father originated it in the decreptive disposition of all things, the Holy Spirit actually wrought it, and the Son Himself assumed it. Not

that there was any distinction of time in these separate actings of the Holy Three in this matter, but only a disposition of order in Their operation. In the same instant of time the Father authoritatively willed that holy humanity into existence, the Holy Spirit efficiently created it, and the Son personally took it upon Him as His own.

"In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure" (verse 6). These words amplify and define the central portion of the preceding verse. There we hear the Son, just prior to His incarnation saying to the Father, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not." Against this a carping objector might reply, True, God never willed those sacrifices and offerings which our idolatrous fathers presented to Baal, nor those which the heathen gave to their gods; but that is a very different thing from saying that no animal sacrifice satisfied Jehovah. Such an objection is here set aside by the plain declaration that even the Levitical offerings contented God not.

"In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure." In these words Christ comprehended all the sacrifice under the Mosaic economy which had respect to the expiation of sin and also the worship of God. In verse 5 the term "sacrifice" includes all those offerings which the Israelites brought to the Lord for the purpose of obtaining His pardon; under the word "offering" was embraced all the gifts which they brought with the object of expressing thanksgiving for blessings received at His hands. Here in verse 6 the latter are, by a synecdoche, referred to by "burnt offerings," and the former by sacrifices "for sin." Concerning both of them Christ said to the Father "Thou wouldest not" (verse 5) and "Thou hast had no pleasure."

The difference between "Thou wouldest not" and "Thou hast had no pleasure" is, the former declares that God had never designed the Levitical offerings should make a perfect satisfaction unto Himself; the latter, that He delighted not in them. Such language is to be understood relatively and not absolutely. God had required sacrifices at the hands of Israel: He had "imposed" them "until the time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10). Absolutely they could neither be said to be wholly nugatory in themselves nor displeasing to God, but as they could not produce any real atonement for sin, they did not correspond in the proper sense of the term either to the Divine pleasure nor to the law of God, but only foreshadowed what was to come. God had ordained a satisfaction possessing such moral

obedience and personal excellency that there would need no more repetition thereof. These words "in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure" serve as a background to bring out in more vivid relief the blessedness of "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17)!

Once more we would point out how that the teaching of these verses supply a timely warning against our making a wrong use of symbolic ordinances. "Whatever may be the use or efficacy of any ordinances of worship, yet if they are employed or trusted unto for such ends as God hath not designed them unto, He accepts not of our persons in them, nor approves of the things themselves. Thus He declares Himself concerning the most solemn institutions of the Old Testament. And those under the New have been no less abused in this way, than those of old" (John Owen).

"Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God" (verse 7). Those words express the readiness and willingness of the Son to do all that had been ordained unto the making of a full satisfaction to God and the salvation of His people. They contain the second branch of the antithesis pointed in the quotation which is here made from the Messianic Psalm. They record the response of the Son's mind and will to the design and purpose of the Father. They conduct us back to the eternal counsels of the Godhead, in which the Father had expressed His determination to have an adequate compensation for the insult to His honor which sin should give, His disapproval of animal sacrifices as the names thereof, His decision that the Son should become incarnate and in human form magnify the law and make it honorable; with the Son's free and perfect acquiescence therein.

"Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." That "will" was not only to "take away sins" (verse 4), which the Levitical offerings had not effected, but was also to make His people "perfect" (verse 1 and cf. Hebrews 5:14). It was the gracious design of God not only to remove all the effects of sin, original and personal, which provoked His judicial hatred of us (Eph. 2:3), but also to provide for and give to them such a righteousness as would occasion Him more cause to love us than ever, and loving to delight in us. His "will" meant not only peace and pardon to us, but grace and favor: as the angels announced to the Bethlehem shepherds, the coming of Christ meant

not only "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace," but also "good will toward men." He had predestinated not only to forgive us, but to have us adopted and graciously "accepted," and that "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:5, 6).

The "will" of God which the Son came here to execute was that "eternal purpose which He had purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). Had He so pleased, God could have "taken away sin" by taking away sinners, and so made a short work of it, by removing them both at one stroke—as Ezekiel speaks (Ezek. 12:3, 4). But instead, He purposed to take away sins in such a way that favored sinners should stand justified before Him. Again, had He so pleased, God could have taken off the sins of His people by a sole and sovereign act of pardon. To hate sin is an act of His nature, but to express His hatred by punishing sin is an act of His will, and therefore might be wholly suspended. Were it an act of the Divine nature to punish sin, then whosoever sinned would die for it immediately; but being an act of His will, He oftentimes suspends the punishment. Seeing He is prepared to forebear for a while, He could have foreborne forever. But His wisdom—the "counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11) deemed it best to require an adequate satisfaction.

What has just been said receives plain confirmation in the words used by the suffering Savior in Gethsemane: "And He said, Abba, Father all things are possible unto Thee: take away this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt." Here the incarnate Son lets us know that the reason why it was not possible for the awful cup of wrath to pass from Him was because God had ordained that He should drink it, and not because there was no other alternative. We indeed can perceive none other, and relatively speaking there was none other after the everlasting covenant had been sealed; yet absolutely considered, speaking from the viewpoint both of God's infinite wisdom and sovereign pleasure, He could, had He so pleased, have saved us in another way. Never allow the thought that sin has produced a situation which in anywise limits or restrains the Almighty. It was by His will that sin entered!

Had God so pleased, He could have accepted the blood of beasts as a full and final atonement for our sins. The only reason why He did not was because He had decreed that Christ should make atonement. He determined in Himself that if He had

satisfaction it should be a full and perfect one. Everything must be resolved into and traced up to the sovereign pleasure of Him who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). It is in the light of what has just been said that we must interpret Hebrews 10:4: it was "not possible" because of the eternal purpose of the Triune Jehovah. God would have satisfaction to the full, or none at all. This the Son knew, and to it He fully consented.

The Son was in perfect accord with the will of the Father from before the foundation of the world. As Zechariah 6:13 tells us "and the covenant of peace shall be between Them Both": the reference being to the "everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). The "counsel of peace" signifies the compact or agreement which was between the Father and the Son. It was, then, by His own voluntary consent that the Son was made "Surety of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22), a title which necessarily imports a definite undertaking on His part, namely, His agreeing to yield that obedience to the law which His people owed, to make reparation to Divine justice on behalf of their sins, and thus discharge the whole of their debt. By a free act of His own will, the Son consented to execute that stupendous work which the Father had proposed unto Him.

This consent of the Son to His Father's proposal to Him before the foundation of the world, was, renewed by Him at the moment of His incarnation: "Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith... a body hast Thou prepared Me... Then said I, Lo, I come..., to do Thy will O God." He freely acquiesced in assuming to Himself a human nature, to take on Himself the "form of a servant," to be "made under the law," to become "obedient unto death." He told the Father so in the above words, which are recorded for His glory and for our instruction, wonderment and joy. The further consideration of them, as well as the meaning of "in the volume of the book it is written of Me" we must defer (D.V.) till our next article.

Hebrews 10:7-10

Chapter 47 - Christ's Dedication

"As in all our obedience there are two principal ingredients to the true and right constitution of it, namely, the matter of the obedience itself, and the principle and fountain of it in us: whereof the one, the apostle calls the 'deed,' the other 'the will' (2 Cor. 8:11) —which latter God accepts in us, oftentimes without, always more than, the deed or matter of obedience itself even so in Christ's obedience, which is the pattern and measure of ours, there are those two eminent parts which complete it. First, the obedience itself, and the worth and value of it in that it is His—so great a person's. Second, the willingness, the readiness to undertake and the heartiness to perform it. The dignity of His person gave the value and merit to the obedience performed by Him. But the will, the zeal in His performance gives the acceptance, and hath besides a necessary influence into the worth of it, and the virtue and efficacy of it to sanctify us. All of which you have in Hebrews 10:7-10.

"The 'offering of the ,body of Jesus Christ:' there is the matter, His becoming 'obedient unto death' (Phil. 2:8). Then there is the readiness by which He did so, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O God,' This calls for not only a distinct but a more eminent consideration, both necessarily concurring to our sanctification and salvation. Now the story of His willingness to redeem and save is of four parts. 1. His actual consent and undertaking to the work, made and given to the Father from everlasting. 2. The continuance of His will to stand to it from everlasting unto the time of His incarnation. 3. The renewal of this consent when He came into the world. 4. The steadfast continuance of that will all along in the performance, from the cradle to the cross.

"It was necessary that Christ's consent should be then given, even from everlasting, and that as God made a promise to Him for us, so also that He should give consent unto God. Yea; and indeed it was one reason why it was necessary that our Mediator should be God, and existent from eternity, not only to the end that He might be

privy to the first design and contrivement of our salvation, and know the bottom of God's mind and heart in it, and receive all the promises of God from God for us, but also in this respect, that His own very consent should go to it from the first, even as soon as His Father should design it. And it was most meet it should be so; for the performance and all the working part of it was to be His, to be laid upon His shoulders to execute, and it was a hard task, and therefore reasonable He should both know it from the first, seeing He was extant together with His Father. It was fit that both His heart and head should be in it from the first. And you have all in one Scripture, Isaiah 9:6, where, when Christ is promised, 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given,' observe under what titles He is set for unto us:

"'Wonderful Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father,' where everlastingness, which is affixed to one, is yet common to those other two. The 'everlasting Counselor,' as well as 'everlasting Father,' for He was both Counselor and Father, in that He was the Mighty God, and all alike from everlasting. For, being God, and with His Father as a Son from everlasting, He must needs be a Counselor with Him, and so privy unto all God meant to do, especially in that very business, for the performance of which He is there saint to be given as a Son, and born as a Child, and the effecting of which is also said to be laid wholly on His shoulder. Certainly in this case, if God could hide nothing from Abraham He was to do, much less God from Christ, who was God with Him from everlasting. And as He was for this cause to be privy to it for the cognizance of the matter, so to have given His actual consent likewise thereunto; for He was to be the Father and Founder of all that was to be done in it. And in that very respect and in relation to that act of will, then passed, whereby He became a 'Father' of that business for us, it is He is styled the 'everlasting Father.' For it is in respect of that everlastingness He is God, and so 'Father' from everlasting, as well as God from everlasting; a 'Counselor' for us with God, a 'Father' of us in our salvation. God's 'Counselor,' because His wisdom was jointly in that plot and the contrivement of it: and 'Father' both of us and this design, because of His will in it, and undertaking to effect it. In that His heart and will were in it as well as the Father's He was therefore the 'Father' of it as well as God, and brought it to perfection" (Adopted, with slight variations,

from T. Goodwin, 1600-1680).

Concerning the continuance of the Son's willingness to the Father's purpose, from everlasting to the time when His humanity was conceived in the Virgin's womb, we have more than a hint in that remarkable passage found in Proverbs 8. There (by the Spirit of prophecy) we are permitted to hear Him say of the Father, "Then I was by Him, as One brought up with him." But not only so, He added, "And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part (that portion where His tabernacle was to be placed) of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men" (verses 30, 31). Thus we see how His heart was more set upon the redeeming of His people than all other works. The theophanic manifestations which He made of Himself from time to time during the O.T. period, illustrated the same fact: see Genesis 12:7, Exodus 3:2-9, Daniel 3:25 etc.

But it is the renewing of His consent when Christ came into the world which we would particularly contemplate. This may well be called the will of consecration of Himself by a vow to this great work, then solemnly made and given. This was the dedication of His holy "Temple" (John 2:19), foreshadowed of old by Solomon in the dedication of the temple which he erected unto God. This took place at the moment that His humanity was conceived by the Virgin: "When He cometh into the world, He saith... a body (a vehicle of service) hast Thou prepared Me,... Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God." How truly marvellous and blessed that it pleased the Holy Spirit (the Divine Secretary of Heaven, and Recorder of the everlasting covenant) to write down for our learning the very words which the Son uttered to His Father at the moment when He condescended to take our nature and become incarnate! Equally wonderful is it that we are permitted to hear the very words which the Father addressed to the Son on His return to Heaven: "The Lord said to My Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (Ps. 110:1).

"When He cometh into the world, He saith." The Speaker is none other than the second person in the Divine Trinity. He was the One who took that "body" into everlasting union with Himself—an infinitely greater condescension than for the noblest king to marry the meanest servant-girl. The ineffably glorious Son of God was personally humbled far more and gave much more away than did

that humanity when it was humiliated by being nailed to the cross. Therefore was His willingness to this tremendous stoop eminently requisite and recorded for our comfort and praise. Thus, at the very moment that the human nature was amaking, and not yet capable of giving its own consent, He who was the Brightness of the Father's glory and the express Image of His person, announced His readiness. Inexpressibly blessed is this; may the contemplation thereof bow us in worship before Him. "Worthy is the Lamb!"

"Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me), to do Thy will, O God" (verse 7). There is a double reference (as is so often the case with the words of God) in the parenthetical clause. The "book" He mentioned primarily regarded the archives of God's eternal counsels, the scroll of His decrees. Secondly, it concerned the Holy Scriptures, which are a partial transcript of that record of the Divine will which is preserved on High (Ps. 119:89). In that "book," drawn up by the Holy Spirit, it is written of Christ, the God-man Mediator for He is the Sum and Substance of all the Divine counsels (Eph. 3:11), as well as the Depository of all the Divine promises (2 Cor. 1:20). The Son was perfectly cognisant of all that was written in that book, for He had been "Counselor" with the Father. The term "volume" is the right translation of the Hebrew word "magillah" in Psalm 40:7, but the Greek word "kephalis" ought most certainly to be rendered "head"—"kephale" occurs seventy-six times in the N.T., and is always rendered "head" elsewhere.

A most wondrous and blessed revelation is here made known to us: "in the head of the book" of God's decrees, at the beginning thereof, it is "written of" Christ! In that book is recorded the names of all God's favored children: Luke 10:20, Hebrews 12:23; but at the head of them is Christ's, for "in all things" He must have the "pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18). Thus, the first name on that heavenly scroll of the Divine decrees is that of the Mediator Himself! So too in the Holy Scriptures, which give us a copy, in part, the first name in the O.T. is that of Christ as Creator (Gen. 1:1 cf. John 1:1-3), and the first name in the N.T. is "Jesus Christ" (Matthew 1:1)! Yes, "in the head of the Book" it is written of Him.

The Man Christ Jesus was the first one chosen of God; chosen to be taken into everlasting union with the second person of the Trinity. Therefore does the Father say to us, "Behold My

Servant, whom I uphold, Mine Elect in whom My soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). The Church was chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4) and then given to Christ (Heb. 2:13). The Man Christ Jesus, taken into union with God the Son, was appointed to be the Head of the whole election of grace, and they to be members of His mystical Body (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:30). "Christ be My first elect He said; Then chose our souls in Christ our Head."

Precious too is it to discover that the human nature of Christ also consented to the terms of the everlasting covenant, for it was something distinct from the Divine nature of God the Son, and so had a distinct will, and was directly concerned in the Great Transaction, for it was to be made the subject of all the sufferings and was to be the sacrifice offered up. The fundamental consent was the Divine Person's, and this He gave when assuming our nature; but there was also an accessory consent of the human nature, now married into one person with the Divine. How soon then, when was it that the human nature gave its consent? No doubt many will deem this a question which it is impossible for us to answer, and that any effort so to do would be a prying into "secret things." Not so: it belongs to those things which are revealed.

Ere turning to the consideration of this marvelous detail, we must not overlook the willingness of the virgin Mary to be—in such an unprecedented manner, and in a way which (humanly speaking) seriously endangered her own moral reputation—the mother of our Lord's sacred humanity. This is most blessedly shown us in the inspired record of Luke's Gospel. There we learn that this amazing honor, yet sore trial, was proposed to her (not forced upon her, for God never violates human accountability!) by the angel: "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus" (1:31). Mark now her meek response: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord"—I give myself up to Him—"be it unto me according to thy word" (1:38). Not until after she had herself acquiesced, did she "conceive"—note the word "before" in Luke 2:21 and compare with Luke 1:31-38. Thus does God make His people "willing" in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3).

Returning now to the willingness of our Lord's humanity in consenting to God's eternal purpose: "This may safely be affirmed, that as soon as, or when first He began to put forth any acts of reason, that then His will was guided to direct its aim and intentions

to God as His Father, from Himself as the Mediator. And look, as in infant's hearts, if they had been born in innocency, there would have been sown the notion of God, whom they should first have known, whatever else they knew; and the moral law being written in their hearts, they should have directed their actions to God and His glory, through a natural instinct and tendency of spirit. Thus it was in Christ when an infant, and such holy principles guided Him to that, which was that will of God for Him, and to be performed by Him; and which was to sway and direct all His actions and thoughts, that were to be the matter of our justification, which were to be exerted more and more according to the capacity of reason as it should grow" (T. Goodwin).

There was a meetness, yea a needs-be for this. For what Christ did as a Child had a meritoriousness in it, as much as what He did when a full-grown Man. So too what He suffered, even in His very circumcision, is made influential unto the sanctification of His people through the virtue of it, equally with what He suffered on the cross. His coat was "without seam" (John 19:23): the righteousness He wrought out for His Church was a unit—beginning at Bethlehem's manger, consummated at Calvary. It is the 22nd Psalm which furnishes a definite answer to our question, and reveals how early the Savior was dedicated to God. Hear His gracious and unique words: "Thou art He that took Me out of the womb: Thou didst make Me hope upon My mother's breasts. I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother's belly" (verses 9, 10). O my brethren and sisters, prostrate your souls in adoration before this Holy One, who from the very first instant after He entered this world was unreservedly dedicated and consecrated to God, owning Him, relying wholly upon Him.

In this we may behold the fulfillment of a lovely and striking type, namely, that of the Nazarite, to which Matthew 2:23 directly, though not exclusively, refers. The "Nazarite" was one who, voluntarily, separated and devoted himself entirely unto the Lord (Num. 6:12). Samson is the outstanding illustration of this in the O.T.: the parallels between him and Christ are remarkable. 1. An angel announced to his mother her conception (Judg. 13:2-3). 2. The prophecy of the angel is recorded. 3. He was sent to a woman utterly barren, to show her conception was extraordinary. 4. Her son was to be a Nazarite, that is, "holy to the Lord" (Num. 6:8). 5. He was to be

"a Nazarite unto God from the womb" (Judg. 13:5). 6. It was declared that her son should be a deliverer of Israel (verse 5). 7. Israel was then subject to the Gentiles (the Philistines), as the Jews were to the Romans when Christ was born. 8. It was in his death that he wrought his mightiest victory!

Equally striking, equally blessed, are the first words which the N.T. records as being uttered by our Savior: "know ye not that in the (affairs) of My Father it behooves to be Me" (Bagster Interlinear). The Greek is very emphatic, the last word before "Me" signifying to be completely and continuously given up to it, and is rendered "wholly" in 1 Timothy 4:15. The reader is familiar with the context of Luke 2:49. The Savior's mother appears to have chided Him, and, in substance, He said: True you are My earthly parent, and I have been subject to you hitherto in your particular province, but do you not know that I have another Father, far higher than you, who hath commanded Me, by virtue of My office of Mediator, other manner of business? I am the Christ, devoted to the Father's interests; His will and law is written in My heart; I am not Mine own!

Let us revert for a moment to the 40th Psalm. There we hear the Savior saying, "Mine ears hast Thou digged" (verse 6): that figurative language applied only to His humanity. The metaphor employed is taken from Exodus 21:1-6. The Hebrew servant was entitled to, "go out free" at the end of the sixth year, but an exception was allowed for: "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then... his master shall bore his ear through with an aul, and he shall serve him for ever" (verses 5, 6). The antitype of this is seen in Christ. As creatures, we are necessarily born "under the law," subjects of the government of God. With the Man Christ Jesus, it was otherwise. His humanity, having been taken into union with the second person in the Trinity, was altogether exempt from any servile subjection, just as a woman ceases to be a subject when married to a king. It was an act of unparalleled condescension, by His own voluntary will, that the God-man entered the place of service; and love, love to His God, to His Church, His people, was the moving-cause.

Observe another thing in the prophetic language of the Mediator in Psalm 40: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me; I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea,

Thy law is within My heart" (verses 7, 8). When the appointed hour arrived the Son volunteered to fulfill every jot and tittle which had been recorded of Him in the Book of God's decrees—transcribed (in part) on the pages of Holy Writ. He carried all of it written in His heart. This was even more than to have His ear "bored"—to give free consent to the Father's purpose; it was, as it would have been if infants had been born in innocency, to have God's law (the expression of His will!) as the molding principle and controlling factor of His human nature, dwelling in the very center of His affections. Thus could He say, "My meat (My very sustenance and substance) is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34) i.e. actualize what the Father had ordained.

Our theme is exhaustless; eternity will be too short to contemplate it. Bear with the writer, dear reader, as he endeavors to follow it a step further. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). What words were those! The Lord Jesus knew the unspeakable bitterness of that baptism, a baptism such as no mere creature could have endured; nevertheless, He panted after it. His very heart was contracted by the delay. Never woman desired more to be delivered than did He to finish His travail, to pass over that "brook" (Ps. 110:7), that sea of wrath into which He should be immersed. Note His remarkable word to Judas: "that thou doest do quickly" (John 13:27).

Again, mark how when He first announced to His disciples His forthcoming sufferings and death (Matthew 16:21), and Peter "took Him (aside as a friend out of natural affection) and began to rebuke Him, saying, Pity thyself, Lord"—Thou who art going about doing good, ministering to the needy, allow not Thyself to suffer such indignities, such an ignominious end. And how did Christ receive this word? Did He appreciate it? No, never did He take any word so ill; never did His holy zeal flash forth more vividly than then. He turned and said unto Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offense unto Me." Never such word was spoken unto saint, before or since. The word "offense" means an occasion of stumbling; Peter's counsel had that tendency in it—to turn Him aside from that great work upon which His heart was so fully set.

There is a remarkable word in the "Pascal Discourse" which it is impossible to explain or account for except on the ground of

that holy impatience or zeal which consumed the Savior to make an end of the work the Father had assigned Him. After Judas had gone out to betray Him, the Savior redeemed the time by speaking at length to the Eleven, and in the midst of so doing He said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence" (John 14:31). He was in haste to be gone, lest the band headed by the betrayer should miss Him in the garden. Then He looked (as it were) at the hour-glass of His life, and seeing that the sands of time had not yet completely run out, He resumed and completed His address.

The closer he drew to the final conflict, the more blessedly did appear the perfectness of His consecration to God. When the moment of arrest arrived, and Peter drew his sword and attempted resistance, the Savior exclaimed, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). When conducted to the hall of judgment, He was not dragged, as an unwilling victim, but was "led as a sheep to the slaughter" (Acts 8:32). Hear His own words—spoken centuries before by the Spirit of prophecy—"The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:5, 6). That (excepting the cross itself) was the hardest part of what had been assigned Him, yet He rebelled not. O blessed Savior grant us more of Thy spirit.

He never showed the slightest sign of reluctance till Gethsemane was reached, when He took (as it were) a more immediate look into the awful cup which He was to drink, and saw in it the wrath of God and His being made a "curse." Then, to exhibit the holiness of His nature, shrinking from being "made sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), to demonstrate the reality of His humanity—trembling, horrified, in anguish at what awaited Him; and to manifest His unquenchable love to us, by making known more clearly what He suffered on our behalf, He cried, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Yet instantly He was quieted: "Nevertheless, not My will be done, but Thine." Thus we are shown again His full and perfect acquiescence to the Father's purpose, and that the one and only object before Him was the doing of the Father's will.

Yet one more thought on this precious subject: "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." Weigh well the verb. It was not merely that

the Son consented to passively endure whatever the Father was pleased to lay upon Him, but also that He desired to actively perform the work which had been allotted to Him. Though that work involved immeasurable humiliation, untold anguish, though it entailed not only Bethlehem's manger but Calvary's cross, He hesitated not. As a child, as a Man, in life and in death, He was "obedient" to His God. Our disobedience was voluntary, so the satisfaction which He made for us was voluntary. Though what He did was done out of love for us, yet chiefly in subjection to God's will and out of love to Him. "I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31)!

Let us pause long enough to make one word of application. In view of all that has been before us, of what surpassing value must be such obedience! When we remember that the One we have been contemplating is none other than the Almighty, who, "hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand and meted heaven with a span" (Isa. 40:12), then is it not obvious that this humiliation and consecration must possess a dignity and efficacy which has more than compensated God for all the dreadful disobedience of His people! It was the Divine excellency of Christ's person which gave infinite worth to all that He did as the God-man-Mediator; therefore is He able to "save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him." O Christian reader look away from self with its ten thousand failures, to Him who is "Altogether Lovely." No matter how black and foul thy sins, the precious blood of such an One cleanseth from them all. And what wholehearted devotion is due unto Him from us! O may His love truly constrain us to obey and please Him.

"Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin Thou wouldest not, neither hast pleasure therein, which are offered by the law; Then said He, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second" (verses 8, 9). In these words we have the apostle's inspired comment upon the remarkable quotation given from Psalm 40. Repetition is here made that the conclusion drawn might the more plainly appear. That to which attention is now directed is to the order of statement, and what that order necessarily intimated. The first word of verse 8 ("Above") and the first of verse 9 ("Then") are placed in opposition and it is to them that the "first" and the "second" at the end of verse 9 looks.

Granting that the Levitical sacrifices were "offered by the law," nevertheless, God rejected them as the means of making real expiation of sin and the saving of His church. This He had made known as far back as the days of David; nor was it a new decision that God formed then, for what He spoke through His prophets in time was but the revelation of what He had decreed in eternity. This the Son, the Mediator, was cognizant of, therefore did He say, "Lo I come to do Thy will, O God." "Lo" Behold! a word signaling what a glorious spectacle was then presented to God, to angels, and to men. "I come" from Heaven to earth, from the "form of God" to the "form of a servant;" come forth like the rising of the sun, with light and healing in his wings, or as a giant rejoicing to run his race. To "do Thy will," to perform Thy counsels, to execute what Thou requirest, to render that entire service of love which Thy people owed unto the law, to perform the great work of redemption. Thus, the perfect obedience of Christ is placed in direct contrast from the whole of the Levitical offerings: His accomplishing what theirs could not.

"He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second." This inference is patent; no other conclusion could be drawn. The Levitical offerings were unefficacious to accomplish the purpose of God; the satisfaction of the incarnate Son had. The Greek word for "taketh away" is even stronger than the term applied to the old covenant—"made old" and "vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). It is usually applied to the taking away of life (Acts 16:27). Dead things are not only useless, but prove harmful carrion, fit only to be buried! Thus it was with the Mosaic shadows. So also an equally emphatic and final word is used in connection with the one offering of our Lord's: it has "established" the will of God concerning the Church. That is, it has placed it on such an immutable foundation that it shall never be moved or altered.

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (verse 10). This is a commentary upon the whole passage. "By," or better "in which will" refers not to Christ's, for the preceding verse speaks of the will of the Father, purposing that Christ should offer the perfect and acceptable sacrifice. Moreover, the "will" is distinguished from the "offering" of the Redeemer. The "Thy will" of verse 9 refers to the eternal agreement between the Father and the Son in connection

with the covenant of redemption, the performing of His "commandment" (John 10:18). "In which will" gives the sphere or element in which the great sacrifice was offered and in which the elect are "sanctified."

"In the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." "Sanctified" positionally, restored to God's favor, standing accepted before Him. The death of Christ was a "sacrifice" (7:27, 9:23), by which He put away sin (Heb. 9:26) and provided for the purging of our conscience (Heb. 9:14) and the setting apart of our persons unto God (Heb. 10:14). All these passages affirm that the death of Christ was a sacrifice by which the elect are separated as a peculiar people unto the worship of the living God. It is important to see the type realized in the Antitype. "As the ancient sacrifices, as symbols in the lower sphere, freed the worshipper from merited (temporal) punishment, because the guilt passed over to the victim, so the death of Christ, in a higher sphere, not only displayed the punishment due to us for sin, but the actual removal of that punishment. It puts us in the position of a people near to God, a holy people, as Israel were in a typical (or ceremonial) sense" (G. Smeaton).

"In the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." "Sanctified is here to be taken in its widest latitude, as including a full expiation of sin, a complete dedication to God, a real purification of our natures, a permanent peace of conscience unto which belongs the privilege of immediate access to God. Faith is the instrumental cause, whereby we enter into the good of it. The Spirit's work within is the efficient cause, whereby we are enabled to believe and lay hold of it. The redemptive work of Christ is the meritorious cause, whereby He earned for us the gift of His Spirit to renew us. But the sovereign and eternal will of the Father is the supreme and originating cause. All that the will of God ordained for the good of His Church is communicated to us through the satisfaction or offering of Christ, but this is only apprehended by an understanding enlightened and a heart opened by the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 10:11-14

Chapter 48 - The Perfecting of the Church

The connection between our present passage and the verses preceding is so close, the relation between them so intimate, that what is now to be before us cannot be understood, and appreciated apart from the other. The design of the whole is to show the superlative excellency of the sacrifice of Christ and what it has procured for His people, with the inevitable setting aside of all the typical offerings. This great change in the outward worship of God's saints on earth was no temporary expediency in view of the failures of fleshly Israel, but was ordained by the Divine counsels before the foundation of the world, recorded in the Book of God's decrees, and, in due time, transcribed upon the pages of Holy Scripture; the 40th Psalm having announced the alteration which was to be brought about by the incarnation and advent to this earth of the Son of God.

Most blessedly does that Messianic Psalm acquaint us with what passed between the Father and the Son and of the covenant agreed upon by Them. Most blessedly are we there shown not only the Son's acquiescence to the Father's purpose, but also His readiness and joy to execute the same. The strenuous undertaking was to rest upon His shoulder, the burden and heat of the day was to be borne by Him, the humiliation and pains of death were to be His portion; yet so far from rebelling against this frightful ordeal, He exclaimed "I delight to do Thy will, O My God" (Ps. 40:8). So dear to Him was the Father's glory, so filled with zeal was He to accomplish His counsels, so deep was His longing to magnify His law and make it honorable, that His very "meat" was to do and accomplish His will. Never did famished mortal so crave food to satisfy hunger, as did the God-man Mediator to perform the Father's pleasure.

He too knew full well that the blood of bulls and goats could never repair the damage which sin had wrought. He too had heartily concurred in the august Council of the Trinity that, if satisfaction were to be made unto Divine justice, then an adequate one should be

given, one which should be suited in every way to meet all the aspects of the case. Inasmuch as it was man who had revolted against the Divine government and broken the Divine law, He was willing to become Man, and in the same nature which had apostatized from God render perfect obedience to Him. Inasmuch as "the Law" was the rule of obedience (Jer. 31:33), comprehending all God's demands, the entire service of love which creatures owe unto their Maker, the Son consented to be "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4) and "fulfill" its precepts (Matthew 5:17). Inasmuch as the penalty of that law was death unto the transgressor, He agreed to be "made a curse for us."

It was not that all of this was forced on the Son, but that He freely agreed thereto. If there are verses which tell us the Father "sent" the Son, there are other passages which declare that the Son "came." Blessedly was this foreshadowed in Genesis 22, where we behold an earthly adumbration of that "counsel of peace" which was between "Both" the Father and the son (Zech. 6:13). There we are shown a human father willing to sacrifice his beloved son upon the altar, and there too we see a human son (then fully grown) willing to be slain! Marvelously did that set forth the mutual consent of the Divine persons with regard to the Great Transaction. Mark attentively, those precious words, "So they went both of them together" (Gen. 22:8)! As we follow Isaac upon mount Moriah, his actions said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God."

In man three things combine to the doing of a thing. First, there is the exercise of will, which is the prime mover and spring of all the rest. Second, there is the exercise of wisdom, by which he plans and arranges. Third, the putting forth of strength to accomplish the same. So it is in the Divine Trinity in connection with the salvation of the Church and all that that entails. "Will" is more generally ascribed to the Father: Matthew 11:26, Ephesians 1:11, etc. "Wisdom" is more eminently attributed to the Son, the "Wonderful Counselor," called so often "Wisdom" in the book of Proverbs, Luke 7:35, 11:49 etc. "Might" to the Holy Spirit—Luke 1:35, where He is designated "the Power of the Highest." The Father contrived the great work of redemption, the Son transacted it, and the Holy Spirit applies the same. Here in Hebrews 10 things are traced back to the first great cause of our salvation, namely, the sovereign will of the Father.

The closer the whole passage be read, the more will it appear that the apostle was moved to ascend in thought to the originating source of redemption. In verse 5 we hear the Lord Jesus saying to the Father concerning the legal sacrifices, "Thou wouldest not," i.e. they were not what Thou didst eternally purpose should take away sins. To this He adds, "But a body hast Thou prepared Me," which (as we have shown) in its deepest meaning signifies: a human nature hast Thou ordained for Me, to be the meet vehicle of service in which I should render an adequate satisfaction. Next, He makes reference to the Book of God's eternal decrees, in view of which He declares, "I come to do Thy will, O God." Finally, the Holy Spirit sums up the whole by affirming "in the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once."

We feel it a bounden duty to enlarge upon this fundamental truth, the more so in view of the present almost universal denial of the absolute sovereignty of God. The Holy Spirit has Himself here emphasized the fact that God's imperial pleasure was the sole moving-cause even in that greatest of all the Divine works, through which is communicated the chiefest glory to God and highest good to His people. God was under no necessity to save any. He "spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell" (2 Pet. 2:4); and had it so pleased Him, He had done the same with the whole human race. There was no necessity in His nature which compelled or even required Him to show mercy; had there been, mercy had been bestowed on the fallen angels! The Almighty is under no restraint either from anything outside or anything inside Himself; to affirm the contrary, would be to repudiate the absolute freedom of His will.

Still less was God under any necessity of giving His own beloved Son if He chose to redeem a part of Adam's race. He who declares, "All nations before Him are as nothing: and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God?" (Isa. 40:17, 18) is not to be measured by human reason nor limited by our unbelief. Had God so pleased He had made this earth a thousand times bigger than it is; and had He so pleased, He had created it a thousand times smaller. In like manner, He was absolutely free to use whatsoever means He determined in order to save His people from their sins. The sending forth of His Son to be made of a woman and to die upon the cross, was not a work of His

nature, but of His will; as He now begets us "of His own will" (James 1:18). True it "became" Him so to do (Heb. 2:10), and He is infinitely honored thereby, yet He could have refused had He so pleased.

Thus, the "will" of God referred to throughout Hebrews 10 is that eternal, gracious, free purpose, by which God determined in Himself to recover His elect out of lost mankind, to remove their sins, sanctify their persons, and bring them nigh unto the everlasting enjoyment of Himself. This act of the will of God was without any meritorious cause foreseen in them, and altogether apart from anything outside Himself to dispose Him thereto. It was His own free and uncaused act by which God purposed so to do. Nor have we the smallest occasion to regard this supremacy of the Most High with any aversion. God is no Tyrant, nor does He act capriciously, His will is a wise and holy one, therefore do we read of Him working "all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11), and therefore did He devise a plan whereby His grace might be most magnified.

It was for this reason He determined that His people should be saved in such a way as to remove all ground for boasting in themselves, and to glory only in God Himself. Therefore did He appoint His own Son to be their Savior, and that by rendering to Him such a satisfaction as would meet every requirement of justice and every demand of the most enlightened conscience. God's end and aim in giving Christ to die was to advance the glory of His grace, which consists in having the monarchy and sole prerogative in saving sinners attributed unto it; the highest of whose honor and eminency is this, that it alone "reigns" (Rom. 5:21), and hath not and could not have any competitor therein. As it is the excellency of God that He is God alone, and there is none beside Him, so it is of His Son that He is Savior alone and there is none beside Him (Acts 4:12).

Unto God the Son, made Man, has been assigned an office which no creature in earth or heaven could possibly fill. The fullest trial and manifestation of this is made in a case of less difficulty (than that of making satisfaction to Divine justice for sin) in Revelation 5. There we read of a challenge given, "Who is worthy to open the book"—which was sealed and held in the hand of God seated on His throne "and to loose the seals thereof?" Waiving the

question as to what "book" this was, we note the response: "And no one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon" (verse 3). Even the beloved John was discouraged, and "wept much because no one was found worthy to open and to read the book" (verse 4). Mark the unspeakably blessed sequel: "One of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seals thereof. And I beheld, and, Lo, in the midst of the throne... stood a Lamb as it had been slain... and He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne" (verses 5-7). If then no mere creature was fit to reveal redemption, how much less to effect it!

Thus, the origin of our salvation is found in the sovereign will of God; the means, in the satisfaction made by His incarnate Son. The two things are brought together in verse 10, "In the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once." "In the which will" has reference to what is recorded in the Book of God's decrees. That "will" was that His people should be "sanctified" unto Him, set apart with acceptance to Him. This was to be effected through "the offering" of Christ, which began at the first moment of His birth and ended when on the cross He cried, "It is finished." This was "once for all."

It was an absolute necessity that there should be these two things: the originating will of God the Father, the consenting will of the Mediator to make full satisfaction for sin. Necessary it was that the Father should be willing and call His Son to this work, for He was the person unto whom the satisfaction was to be made. Had Christ performed all that He did, freely and gladly, yet, unless the Father had first decreed that He should and had "called" Him unto it, then had He rejected the whole, asking "who hath required this at Thy hand?" Therefore has the Spirit insisted upon this foundational fact again and again in the course of this epistle: see Hebrews 2:10; 3:4, 5; 6:17 etc. Thus does Hebrews 10:10 ascribe as much, yea more, to God's appointing and accepting of Christ's sacrifice, as to the merits of Christ unto the sanctification of His people.

"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting, till His

enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified (verses 11-14). "These words are an entrance into the close of that long blessed discourse of the apostle, concerning the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, their dignity and efficacy; which he shuts up and finisheth in the following verses, confirming the whole with the testimony of the Holy Spirit before producing by Him.

"Four things doth he here instruct us in, by way of recapitulation of what he had declared and proved before. 1. The state of the legal priests and sacrifices, as unto the recognition of them, by which he had proved before their utter insufficiency to take away sin (verse 11). 2. In that one offering of Christ, and that once offered, in opposition thereunto (verse 12). 3. The consequence thereof on the part of Christ; whereof there are two parts. First, His state and condition immediately ensuing thereon (verse 12), manifesting the dignity, efficacy and absolute perfection of His offering. Secondly, as unto the continuance of His state and condition afterwards (verse 13). 4. The absolute effect of his sacrifice, which was the sanctification of the Church (verse 14)" (John Owen).

"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (verse 11). The opening "And" links this verse with the 10th, for the purpose of accentuating the blessedness of what is there declared. Once more the Holy Spirit emphasizes the contrast between the all-sufficient offering of Christ and the unefficacious offerings under the law. This is brought out under five details, upon which there is little need for us to enlarge at length.

First, under the law the sacerdotal office was filled by many: attention is called to this by the "every priest," which is set over against the "this Man" of verse 12, who was competent by Himself to do all God required. Second, the Levitical priests stood. This was true both of the high priests and of all under him. No chair or seat was provided for them in either the tabernacle or temple, for their work was never ended. Third, they were employed daily, which showed they were unable to do immediately and once for all that which would satisfy God. Fourth, they oftentimes presented "the same sacrifices": true, they varied in detail and design, nevertheless they had this in common, that, they were irrational creatures,

incapable of offering intelligent and acceptable obedience to God. Fifth, they could not meet the infinite demands of justice, expiate sins, nor provide a permanent resting-place for an exercised conscience.

An improvement should be made of what has just been before us, by pointing out the utter worthlessness of all human devices for appeasing God and comforting the conscience. If the Levitical offerings, which were of Divine appointment, were unable to really meet either the full requirements of God or the deepest need of sinners, how much less can the contrivances of man do so! How vain are the Romish inventions of confession, absolution, indulgencies, masses, penances, purgatory, and the like tomfooleries! Equally vain are the austerities of some Protestants: the signing of a temperance-pledge, giving up of tobacco, and other reformatations, with tears, lastings, and religious performances designed to make peace with God. The salvation of the Lord does not come to a soul via any such things. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5, 6).

"But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever sat down on the right hand of God" (verse 12). The opening word denotes that a contrast is here presented from what was before us in verse 11: it is the Holy Spirit placing in antithesis the one perfect and efficacious offering of Christ from the unavailing sacrifices of the law. The word "Man" ought to be in italics: if any word is to be supplied it should be that of "Priest." The Greek simply reads, "But He," the pronoun being emphatic. It is the sacerdotal work of the Mediator which is in view. He came and once for all laid Himself on the Divine altar as an atonement to God—the entire course of His obedience terminating and being consummated at the cross.

There is both a comparison and a contrast here between Christ and Aaron and his successors. Both were priests; both offered a sacrifice for sins; but there the analogy between them ends. They were many; He alone. They offered numerous sacrifices; He, but one. They continued to offer sacrifices; His is complete and final. Their offerings were unefficacious; His, has actually removed sins.

They stood; He has sat down. They ministered unto God; He is seated at the right hand of God. The typical high priest entered the holiest only for a brief season, one day in the year; Christ has gone on High "forever." He has not ceased to be a Priest, nor to exercise that office; but He is now "a Priest upon His throne" (Zech. 6:13). The position He occupies witnesses to the supreme excellency of His work, and attests the acceptance of His sacrifice by God. The glorious place which our once humiliated Savior has been accorded, supplies conclusive evidence of the value and finality of His redemptive work. "The very fact that Christ is in heaven, accepted by His Father, proves that His work must be done. Why, beloved, as long as an ambassador from our country is at a foreign court, there must be peace; and as long as Jesus Christ our Savior is at His Father's court, it shows that there is real peace between His people and His Father. Well, as He will be there forever, that shows our peace must be continued and shall never cease. But that peace could not have been continual, unless the atonement had been wholly made, unless justice had been entirely satisfied" (C.H. Spurgeon).

Commentators have been divided as to whether the "for ever" is to be connected with the Savior's one sacrifice or to His sitting down at God's right hand. The Greek, while hardly conclusive, decidedly favors the latter. Perhaps the double thought is designed. They who insist that the "for ever" must be joined to the first clause, argue that it cannot be so with the second because 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Revelation 19:11 etc. show that the Savior will yet leave Heaven. As well might appeal be made to Christ's "standing" to receive Stephen (Acts 7:55). But the difficulty is self-created through carnalizing the metaphor used. "For ever sat down" is in designed contrast from the "standeth daily" of verse 11. Christ has ceased for ever from the priestly work of making oblation: He will never again be engaged in such a task; but He has other characters to fill beside that of Maker of atonement.

"For ever sat down on the right hand of God." Four times in this epistle is reference made to Christ's being seated on High, yet is there no repetition. On each occasion the reference is found connected with an entirely different line of thought. First, in Hebrews 1:3 it is His seat of personal glory which is in view: the whole context before and after showing that. Second, in Hebrews 8:1 it is the seat of priestly pre-eminence which He occupies,

namely, His superiority over all others who filled the sacerdotal office. Third, here in Hebrews 10:12 it is the seat of sacrificial acceptance, God's witness to the value of His satisfaction. Fourth, in Hebrews 12:2 it is the seat of the Victor, the prize given for having successfully run His race.

The One born in Bethlehem's manger, who on earth had not where to lay His head, who died upon the cross, and whose body was laid in a borrowed grave, is now in Heaven. He has been given a place higher than that of the arch-angel, He has been exalted above all created things. There is a glorified Man at God's right hand! Christ is the only one among all the hosts above who deserves to be there! It is naught but Divine favor which gives holy angels and redeemed sinners a place in the Father's House; but the Man Christ Jesus has merited that high honor!

"The highest place that Heaven affords,
Is His by sovereign right,
King of kings and Lord of lords,
He reigns there in the Light."

Unspeakably blessed is this; the more so when it be realized that Christ has entered heaven for His people. He has gone there in his official character. He has gone there as our Representative; to appear before God "for us" (Heb. 9:24). He is there as our great High Priest, bearing our names on His breastplate. Wondrous and precious are those words, "Whither the fore-runner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). There the mighty Victor sits "crowned with glory and honor." He occupies the Throne of universal dominion, of all-mighty power, of sovereign and illimitable grace. He is making all grace. He is making all things work together for the good of His own. The kingly scepter shall He wield until all His redeemed are with Him in glory.

"From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool" (verse 13). In these words we have the seventh and last N. T. reference made to the 110th Psalm. There we read. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool" (verse 1). Allusion is here made to that promise of the Father to the Son for the purpose of supplying additional confirmation of what had just been declared. In verses 10, 12 (also in 14), the utter needlessness for any repetition of Christ's sacrifice is shown, here the impossibility of it. From the beginning, a

state of glory and position of honor had been appointed the Mediator following on the presentation of His offering to God. He was to take His place on the throne of heaven, till His foes were completely subjugated: therefore to enter the place of service and die again He was no longer capable!

The suffering Savior has been invested with unlimited power and dominion, and nothing now remains but the accomplishing of all those effects which His sacrifice was designed to procure. These are twofold; the saving of His elect, the subjugating of all revolvers against God, for "He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). The Redeemer having perfected His great work, now calmly awaits the fulfillment of the Father's promise: cf. 1 Corinthians 15:25-27. Christ will yet put forth His mighty power and overthrow every proud rebel against Him. He will yet say, "I will tread them in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments . . . for the day of vengeance is in Mine heart" (Isa. 63:3, 4): cf. Revelation 14:20. Then will men experience the terribleness of "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).

The "wrath of the Lamb" is as much a perfection as is the "love of Christ." In His overthrow of God's adversaries, His glory shines as truly as when He conducts the redeemed into the Father's House. He is equally to be adored when we behold His vesture stained with the blood of His enemies, as when we see His life ebbing from His side pierced for us. Each was an intrinsic part of that work assigned Him of the Father. Though in our present state we are apt to shrink-back with horror, as we contemplate Him saying to those who despised and rejected Him. "Depart from Me, ye cursed," yet in that day we shall praise Him for it. "Oh! what a triumph that will be, when men, wicked men, persecutors, and those who opposed Christ, are all cast into the lake that burneth" (C.H. Spurgeon).

A remarkable adumbration (shadowing forth) of what has just been before us was made by God in A.D. 70. During the days of His flesh, the enemies of Christ pursued Him with relentless hatred. Nor was their enmity appeased when they had hounded Him to death: their rage continued to vent itself upon His followers. No one can read through the book of Acts without discovering many an

evidence of the rancor of apostate Judaism against the early Christians. Loudly did the Jews boast of their triumph against Jesus of Nazareth, and for a time it looked as though they would prevail against His church. Though the issue hung in suspense for some years, God made a complete end to the same by utterly destroying them as a nation, and thereby gave a pledge of the eternal destruction of those who obey not the Gospel. In sending the Romans to burn their city and raze their temple, we discover a solemn foreshadowing of that which shall yet take place when Christ says, "But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay before Me" (Luke 19:27).

But let our final thought of this 13th verse be one of a different tenor. In the word "expecting" we have manifested again the lovely moral perfections of the Mediator. Christ is able to destroy all His enemies in a moment, yet for nineteen centuries He has bided His time. Why? Because, even in Heaven, He meekly and gladly bows to the Father's pleasure. His final triumph is still postponed, because He calmly waits that day which God has "appointed" (Acts 17:31). Therefore do we read of "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). In this too He sets us an example. Whatever be our lot and condition, however the forces of evil rage against us, we are to possess our souls in patience (Luke 21:19), knowing that there is a "set time" to favor Zion (Ps. 102:13). Ere long, every enemy of Christ and of His church shall be overthrown—overthrown, not "reconciled": "His enemies be made His footstool" plainly gives the lie to the dreams of Universalists!

"For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (verse 14). Three things claim our attention here: first, the relation of this view to the context; second, what is meant by "perfected for ever"?; third, who are the "sanctified"? The link between our verse and what precedes is contained in the opening "For," which has a double force. First, it intimates that what is now said furnishes additional proof for the thesis of the whole passage: the very fact that the one offering of Christ has "perfected for ever" (contrast Hebrews 7:17!) those sanctified by God, gives further demonstration of the efficacy and sufficiency of it, and the needlessness of any repetition. Second, the same fact manifests the meet-ness of the Mediator's sitting at God's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool—His work having accomplished

such a blessed result, He is entitled both to rest and reward.

"For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." The word for "perfected" literally means "completed" or "consummated." It is more of an objective than a subjective perfection which is here in view, as the immediate context and the whole epistle shows. This verse is not speaking of the Church's eternal state in Glory, but of its present standing before God. By His sacrifice Christ has procured for His people the full pardon of sin and peace before God thereon. The "one offering" of the Lord Jesus possesses such infinite merits (being that of an infinite or Divine person in a holy humanity), that it has wrought out a complete expiation and secured for "His own" personal acceptance with and access to God, a priestly standing and covenant nearness before Him.

Because their salvation has been accomplished by the vicarious obedience and vicarious suffering, in life and in death, by no less a person than Immanuel, because He glorified God's law by keeping it fully and enduring its curse, His people are both perfectly justified and perfectly sanctified, that is, a complete righteousness and complete fitness to worship in the Temple of God is theirs, not in themselves, but through Christ their Head. Their title to heaven is founded alone on the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Their fitness is given when the Holy Spirit regenerates them. Their present enjoyment of the same is determined by the maintenance of communion with God day by day. Their perfect and eternal enjoyment thereof will issue from their glorification at the return of the Savior.

The word "perfected" here is to be understood in a sacrificial rather than in an experimental sense. It has reference to the Christian's right to stand in the holy presence of God in unclouded peace. Our title so to do is as valid now as it will be when we are glorified, for that title rests alone on the sacrificial work of our Substitute, finished on the cross. It rests on something altogether external to ourselves, altogether apart from what God's sovereign grace works in us or through us, either when we first believe or afterwards. We are precious in the sight of God according to the preciousness of Christ: see Ephesians 1:6, John 17:22, 23. Yet, let it be added that, this perfect objective sanctification (our consecration to God by Christ) in no wise renders the less requisite our need of

being constantly cleansed, experimentally, by the Spirit's use of the Word: John 13:10, 1 Peter 1:2 etc.

Those perfected by the "one offering" of Christ are "them that axe sanctified," or more literally, simply "the sanctified," the reference being to those who were eternally set apart by the Father (Jude 1). The persons of the elect are variously designated in this epistle. They are referred to as "heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14), "sons" (Heb. 2:10), "brethren" of Christ, (Heb. 2:12), "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1), "heirs of promise" (Heb. 6:17), "the house of Israel" and "of Judah" (Heb. 8:8); but here "the sanctified," because the Spirit's object in the whole of this passage is to trace everything to its originating source, namely, the imperial will of a sovereign God.

Hebrews 10:15-18

Chapter 49 - Sanctification

The verses which are now to be before us bring to a close the principal argument which the apostle was setting before the Hebrews; that which follows, partakes more of the nature of a series of exhortations, drawn from the thesis which had previously been established. The immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, seen in the glorious person of our great High Priest and the perfect efficacy of His sacrifice, had been fully demonstrated. "Here we are come unto a full end of the dogmatical part of this epistle, a portion of Scripture filled with heavenly and glorious mysteries, the light of the church of the Gentiles, the glory of the people Israel, the foundation and bulwark of faith evangelical" (John Owen). Immediately afterward that eminent expositor added, (words which most suitably express the writer's own sentiments) the following:—

"I do therefore here, with all humility, and sense of my own weakness and utter inability for so great a work, thankfully own the guidance and assistance which hath been given to me in the interpretation of it, so far as it is, or may be of use unto the church, as a mere effect of sovereign and undeserved grace. From that alone it is, that having many and many a time been at an utter loss as to the mind of the Holy Spirit, and finding no relief in the worthy labors of others, He hath graciously answered my poor, weak supplications, in supplies of the light and evidence of truth."

The relation of our present passage to what has been before us in the last article is this: in verses 11-14 the perfection of Christ's sacrifice is declared: first, comparatively in 11-14, and then singly in 14; while in verses 15-17 a further proof or confirmation of this is given from the Old Testament Scriptures. So efficacious was the mediatorial work of Christ that, "by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Said the Puritan Charnock, "That one offering was of such infinite value that it perfectly purchased the taking away of sin, both in the guilt, filth, and power, and was a sufficient price for all the grace believers should need for their

perfect sanctification to the end of the world. There was the satisfaction of His blood for the removal of our guilt, and a treasure of merit for the supply of our grace" (Volume 5, p. 231).

There is a further link between our preceding portion and the present one. In verse 14 the apostle had declared "For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified," now he describes those marks by which the "sanctified" are to be identified. Unto those who really value their souls and are deeply concerned about their eternal destiny, this is a vitally important consideration. How may I know that I am one of that favored company for whom the incarnate Son of God offered Himself a sacrifice for sin? What clear and conclusive evidence do I possess that I am among the "sanctified?" Answer to these weighty questions is furnished in the verses which we are now to ponder. May each reader join with the writer in begging God to grant him an honest heart and a discerning eye to see whether or not they describe what has been actually made good in his own experience.

"Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us: for after that He had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (verses 15-18). There are two parts to the assertion made in verse 14: first, "them that are sanctified"; second, such are "perfected forever." In the proof-text which the apostle here gives, both of these are found, though in the inverse order: the "sanctified" are they in whose hearts God puts His laws; those who are "perfected forever" are they whose sins God remembers no more.

"Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us" (verse 15). "The foundation of the whole preceding discourse of the apostle, concerning the glory of the priesthood of Christ, and the efficacy of His sacrifice, was laid in the description of the new covenant, whereof He was the Mediator, which was confirmed and ratified by His sacrifice, as the old covenant was by the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 9:10-13). Having now abundantly proved and demonstrated what he designed concerning them both, His priesthood and His sacrifice, He gives us a confirmation of the whole, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, in the description of

that covenant which he had given before. And because the crisis to which he had brought his argument and disputation, was, that the Lord Christ, by reason of the dignity of His person and office, with the everlasting efficacy of His sacrifice, was to offer Himself but once, which virtually includes all that he had before taught and declared, including in it an immediate demonstration of the insufficiency of all those sacrifices which were often repeated, and consequently their removal out of the church; he returns unto those words of the Holy Spirit for the proof of this particular also" (J. Owen).

"Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us" (verse 15). Three questions are suggested by these words. First, unto what is the Holy Spirit a "Witness?" Second, what is the "also" to be connected with—who else has witnessed to the same thing? Third, how does the Holy Spirit "witness?" Let us, then, seek answers to these queries.

Unto what is it that the Holy Spirit is here said to be a "Witness?" If we go back no farther than the preceding verse, the answer would be, unto the fact that the one satisfaction which has been made by the Redeemer secures the eternal perfection of all who are sanctified; what follows in verses 16-18 bears this out. Nevertheless, we are persuaded that it is necessary to look farther afield if we are to obtain the deeper and fuller answer. The satisfaction made by the Redeemer was the fulfilling of the Divine "will," the performing of that which had been stipulated in the everlasting covenant; and it is of that the whole context is speaking. The Holy Spirit was present when that wondrous compact was made between the Father and the Mediator, and through Jeremiah He made known a part of its glorious promises. The proof of this will become clearer as we advance.

Second, "whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us" looks back to verse 9. There we have the testimony of the Son unto the eternal decree which God had made, and which He had come to execute; here (in verses 17, 18) that of the Spirit to what the Father had promised the Mediator He would do unto His covenant people. Thus, we may here behold the three persons of the Godhead concurring. Yet there is such a fullness to the words of Scripture that we do not think what has just been pointed out exhausts the scope of this word "also." The leading thought of the context (and of the

epistle) is the sufficiency, finality, and efficacy of the one sacrifice of Christ. That was "witnessed" to when the Mediator "sat down on the right hand of God" (verse 12); and the Holy Spirit is also a witness to us of the same blessed fact by means of His work of sanctification in the hearts and minds of those for whom Christ died.

As to how the Spirit witnesses to us, the first method is by means of the written Word; specifically, by what He gave out by the prophet Jeremiah. The apostle had argued the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice from its singularity (verse 12), in contrast from the many sacrifices of Judaism (verse 11); and the finality of it from the fact that He was now "sat down," indicating that His work of oblation was finished. To this the Hebrews might object that what the apostle had pointed out were but plausible reasonings, to which they could not acquiesce unless they were confirmed by the clear testimony of Scripture; and therefore did he now quote once more from the memorable prophecy of Jeremiah 31, which clearly established the conclusions he had drawn. How the terms of that prophecy ratified his deductions will appear in the sequel.

"Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us." As we have seen, the first reference here is to what is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Scriptures, for "The prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). But more, the Holy Scriptures are also the testimony of the Holy Spirit because of His presence and authority in them continually. As we read the written Word, we are to recognize the voice of the Spirit of truth speaking to us immediately out of them. As we do this, we shall recognize that Word as the final court of appeal in all matters of conduct. That Word alone is that whereunto our faith is to be resolved.

"Whereof the Holy Spirit is also a witness to us." The last two words need to be carefully observed in these days, when there are so many who (under the guise of "rightly dividing the Word") would rob the children of God of a part of their needed bread—let the reader be much on his guard against such men. What the prophet Jeremiah gave out was for the people of God in his day. True, and hundreds of years later the apostle did not hesitate to say that what Jeremiah wrote was equally "to us"; note particularly, not only "for" us, but "to us"! The whole of God's Word, beginning to end, was

written for the good of His people until the end of the world.

But further, the Holy Spirit is not only a Witness unto us of the everlasting covenant and of the efficacy of Christ's offering through the written Word objectively, but also by His application of that Word to us subjectively. As said the apostle unto the Corinthians, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). A cause is known by its effects, a tree by its fruits; so the value and virtue of Christ's sacrifice are witnessed to us by the Spirit through the powerful workings of His grace on our hearts. Every grace implanted by the Spirit in the Christian's soul was purchased by the obedience and blood of Christ, and are living evidences of the worth of them.

"For after that He had said before" (verse 15). The particular proof-text from Jeremiah which the apostle was about to quote is prefaced by these words of his own, as also is the clause "saith the Lord" in the next verse the apostle's language. If it be asked, what was it that was said "before?" the answer is, "This is the covenant that I will make with them." If it be inquired, what is that which is said after? even this: "I will put My laws into their hearts" etc. The particular point to be observed is, that these Divine mercies of God's putting His laws into our hearts and forgiving our sins, are the immediate fruits of Christ's sacrifice, but more remotely, are the fulfillment of God's covenant-promises unto the Mediator.

The everlasting covenant which God made with Christ is the ground of all the good which He does to His people. Proof of this statement is supplied in many a scripture, which is little pondered in these days. For example, in Exodus 6:5 we find Jehovah saying to Moses, "I have remembered My covenant," which is rendered as the reason for His bringing of Israel out of Egypt. Again, in Psalm 105:8 we are told, "He hath remembered His covenant forever." So in Ezekiel 16:60 God declares, "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." While in Luke 1, we read in the prophecy of Zacharias, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world

began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant" (verses 68-72).

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord" (verse 16). The reference is to the "new covenant" of Jeremiah 31:31, so called not because it was new made, for with respect to its original constitution it was made with the elect in Christ their Head from all eternity (Titus 1:1, 2); nor as newly revealed, for it was made known in measure to the O.T. saints; but it is so referred to in distinction from the former administration of it, which had waxen old and vanished away. It is also called "new" because of the "new heart," "new spirit," "new song" which it bestows, and because of new ordinances (baptism and the Lord's supper) which have displaced the old ones of circumcision and the passover-supper. Further, it may suitably be designated as "new" because its vigor and efficacy are perpetual; it will never be antiquated or give place to another.

"I will put My law into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them" (verse 16). And who are the favored ones in whom God works thus? Those whom He eternally set apart (Eph. 1:4), those whom He gave to the Mediator (John 17:6), those for whom Christ died: "whom He did predestinate, those He also called" (Rom. 8:30). These, and these only, are the ones with whom God deals so graciously. Others may, through religious instruction or personal effort, acquire a theoretical acquaintance with the laws of God, but only His elect have a vital knowledge of Him.

"I will put My laws into their hearts." As we deem this expression of tremendous importance, we will endeavor to explain it according to the measure of light which God has granted us thereon. First, it will aid us to an understanding thereof if we consider the case of Adam. When he left the Creator's hands the law of God was in his heart, or, in other words, he was endowed with all sorts of holy properties, instincts and inclinations unto whatsoever God did command, and an antipathy against all He forbade. That was the "law" of the nature of his heart. The laws of God in Adam were Adam's original nature, or constitution of His spirit and soul, as it is the law of nature in beasts to love their young, and of birds to build their nests.

"When God created man at first, He gave him not an outward

law written in letters or delivered in words, but an inward law put into his heart, and concreated with him, and wrought in the frame of his soul. And the whole substance of this law of God, the mass of it, was not merely dictates or beams of light in his understanding, directing what to do; but also real, lively, and spiritual dispositions, and inclinations in his will and affections, carrying him on to what was so directed, as to pray, love God, and fear Him; to seek His glory in a spiritual and holy manner. They were inward abilities suited to every duty" (T. Goodwin, Volume 6, p. 402). The external command of Genesis 2:17 was designed as the test of his responsibility; what God had graciously placed within him, was the equipment for the discharging of his responsibility.

Should it be inquired, where is the scripture which teaches that God placed His laws in the heart of unfallen Adam? it is sufficient to reply that Psalm 40:8 presents Christ as saying, "Thy law is within My heart," and Romans 5:14 declares that Adam was "the figure of Him that was to come." But more, just as we may discover what grain the earth bears by the stubble which is found in the field, so we may ascertain what was in unfallen man by the ruins of what is yet to be seen in fallen and corrupt humanity. Romans 2:14 says the Gentiles "do by nature the things contained in the law": their very conscience tells them that immorality and murder are crimes. Thus, as an evidence that the law of God was originally the very "nature" of Adam, we have the shadow of it in the hearts of all men.

Alas, Adam did not continue as God created him: he fell, and the consequence was that his heart was corrupted, his very "nature" vitiated, so that the things he once loved he now hated, and what he should have hated, he now served. Thus it is with all of his fallen descendants: being "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18) their carnal mind "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Instead of that holy "nature" or spiritual propensities and properties, man is now in-dwelt and dominated by sin; hence, Romans 7:23 teaches us that sin is a "law" in our members, namely, "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). And thus it is that in Jeremiah 17:1 (as the opposite of Hebrews 10:16) sin and corruption in the heart is said to be "written with a pen of iron, with the point of a diamond."

Now in regeneration and sanctification the "image" of God, after which Adam was originally created, is again stamped upon the soul: see Colossians 3:10; the laws of God are written on the Christian's heart, so that it becomes his very "nature" to serve, obey, please, honor, and glorify God. Because the law of God is renewed again in the soul, it is termed the "law of the mind" (Rom. 7:23), for the mind is now regulated by the authority of God and turns as instinctively to Him as does the sunflower to the sun, and as the needle answers to the loadstone. Thus, the renewed heart "delights in the law of God" (Rom. 7:22), and "serves the law of God" (Rom. 7:25), it being its very "nature" so to do.

This wondrous change which takes place in each of those for whom Christ died is here attributed directly and absolutely to God: "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." This is much more than a bare offer being made unto men, far beyond an ineffectual invitation which is to be received. It is an invincible and miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit, which thoroughly transforms the favored subjects to it. Only He who first made man, can remake him. None but the Almighty can repair the awful damage which the Fall wrought, counteract the dreadful power of sin, deliver the heart from the lusts of the flesh, the thralldom of the world, the bondage of Satan, and rewrite upon it His holy law, so that He will be loved supremely and served sincerely and gladly.

"I will put My laws into their hearts." This is in contrast from those who were under the old, or Sinaitic covenant. There the "ten words" were engraven upon tables of stone, not only to intimate thereby their fixed and permanent authority, but also to figure forth the hardness of the hearts of the unregenerate people to whom they were given. But under the new covenant—that is, the administration of the everlasting covenant and the application of its grace to God's elect in this Gospel dispensation—God gives efficacy to His holy law in the souls of His people. First, by subduing and largely removing the enmity of the natural heart against Him and his law, which subduing is figuratively spoken of as a circumcising of the heart (Deut. 30:6) and a "taking away the stony heart" (Ezek. 36:26). Second, by implanting the principle of obedience to His law, which is figuratively referred to as the giving of "an heart of flesh" and the "writing of His laws upon the heart."

Observe very particularly, dear reader, that God here says not "I will put My promises" but "My laws in their hearts." He will not relinquish His claims: unreserved subjection to His will is what His justice requires and what His power secures. The grand triumph of grace is, that "enmity" against the law (Rom. 8:7) is displaced by "love" for the law (Ps. 119:97). This is it which explains that word in Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul." It will probably surprise most of our readers (alas that it should do so) to be told that the Gospel never yet "converted" anybody. No, it is the law which the Spirit uses to convict of rebellion against God, and not until the soul penitently repudiates and forsakes his rebellion, is it ready for the message of peace which the Gospel brings.

The careful reader will notice there is a slight difference between the wording of Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16. In the former it is "I will put My laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts," but in the passage now before us the two clauses are reversed. One reason for this is as follows: Hebrews 8:10 give the Divine order of operation: the mind is first informed, and then the heart is reformed. Moreover, in Hebrews 8:10 it is a question of knowing God, and for that, the understanding must be enlightened before the affections can be drawn out of Him—none will love an unknown God. The Spirit beans by conveying to the regenerate an efficacious knowledge of the authority and excellency of God's laws, giving them a powerful realization both of their binding force and spirituality; and then He communicates a love for them, so that their hearts are heartily inclined toward them.

When the apostle defines the seat of the corruption of our nature, he places it in the "mind" and "heart": "Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind; having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Therefore does the Divine work of sanctification, or the renovating of our natures, consist of the rectifying both of the mind and heart, and this, by furnishing them with the principles of faith, love, and adherence to God. Thus, the grace of the new covenant (purchased for His people by Christ) is as extensive to repair our "nature" as sin is (in its residence and power) to deprave us. God desireth truth "in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6)—not that outward conformity to His law

may be dispensed with, for that is required too, but unless it proceed from an inward love for His law, the external actions cannot be accepted by Him.

"From these things we may easily discern the nature of that grace which is contained in this first branch of the first promise of the covenant. And this is the effectual operation of His Spirit, in the renovation and saving illumination of our minds, whereby they are habitually made conformable unto the whole law of God, that is, the rule and the law of our obedience in the new covenant, and enabled unto all acts and duties that are required of us. And this is the first grace promised and communicated unto us by virtue of this covenant, as it was necessary that so it should be. For, 1. the mind is the principal seat of all spiritual obedience. 2. The proper and peculiar actings of the mind in discerning, knowing, judging, must go before the actings of the will and affections, much more before all outward practices. 3. The depravation of the mind is such by blindness, darkness, vanity and enmity, that nothing can inflame our souls, or make an entrance towards the reparation of our natures, but an internal, spiritual, saving operation of grace upon the mind" (John Owen).

In Hebrews 10:16 the heart is mentioned before the mind because the Spirit is here giving the Divine standard for us to measure ourselves by: it is the test whereby we may ascertain whether or no we are among the "sanctified," who have been perfected forever by the one offering of Christ. An intellectual knowledge of God's laws is no proof of regeneration, but a genuine heart-acquaintance with them is. The questions I need to honestly face are such as these: Is there within me that which answers to the Law without me? That is, is it actually and truly my desire and determination to be regulated and controlled by the revealed will of God? Is it the deepest longing of my soul, and the chief business of my life, to please and serve God? Is it the great burden of my prayers that He will work in me "both to will and to do of His good pleasure?" Is my deepest grief occasioned by my failure to be altogether holy in my wishes and words and ways? Experimentally, the more we love God, the more shall we discern the excellency of His law.

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (verse 17). Notice again the order of our passage: what is found here

comes after verse 16, and not before. In the order of grace, justification (of which forgiveness is the negative side) precedes sanctification, but in the believer's apprehension it is otherwise: I can only ascertain God's justifying of me, by making sure I have within the fruits of His sanctifying me. I must study the effects to discover the cause. In like manner, God elects before He calls, or regenerates, but I have to make my calling "sure" in order to obtain evidence of my election: see 2 Peter 1:10. There are many who give no sign of God's law being written in their hearts, who nevertheless claim to have had their sins forgiven by Him; but such are sadly deceived. Scripture entitles none to regard themselves as Divinely pardoned save those who have been saved from self-will and self-pleasing.

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." These words must not be understood to signify that the sins of God's people have vanished from His essential mind, but rather that they will never be recalled by Him as He exercises His office as Judge. Our Substitute having already discharged our liabilities and Justice having been fully satisfied, payment cannot be demanded twice over. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). This is the negative side of the believer's justification, that his sins are not reckoned to his account; the positive aspect is that the perfect law-righteousness of Christ is imputed to him.

"Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (verse 18). Here the apostle draws the irrefutable conclusion from the premises he had so fully established. Before pondering it, let us give a brief summary of these wonderful verses. First, the everlasting covenant is the foundation of all God's gracious dealings with His elect. Second, that eternal compact between the Father and the Mediator is now being administered under the "new covenant." Third, the design of this covenant is not to set apart a people unto external holiness only, but to so sanctify them that they should be holy in heart and life. Fourth, this sanctification of the elect is effected by the communication of effectual grace unto them for their conversion and obedience, which is here (under a figure) spoken of as God's putting His laws into their hearts and writing them in their minds. Fifth, this practical sanctification is God's continuation of that work of grace which He begins in us at regeneration—our

glorification is the completing of the same, for then the last remains of sin will be removed from us, and we shall be perfectly conformed to the image of His Son.

"Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." These words give the apostle's application of the Scripture quoted from Jeremiah, which was made for the express purpose of demonstrating the perfection of Christ's sacrifice. The conclusion is irresistible: the one offering of Christ has secured that the grace of the everlasting covenant shall be communicated unto all of those for whom He died, both in the sanctifying and justifying of their persons. Since then their sins are all gone from before the face of God, no further sacrifice is needed.

Hebrews 10:19-23

Chapter 50 - Access to God

The verses which are now to engage our attention contain the apostle's transition from the doctrinal to the practical part of the epistle, for privileges and duties are never to be separated. Having at great length discoursed upon the priestly office of Christ in the foregoing part of the epistle, he now sums up in a few words the scope and substance of all he had been saying (verses 19-21), and then draws the plain inference from the whole (verse 22). Like a wise master-builder, he first digs till he comes to the foundation, and then calls himself and others to build upon it with confidence. Having demonstrated the vast superiority of Christianity over Judaism, the apostle now exhorts his Christian readers to avail themselves of all their blessed advantages and enjoy the great privileges which have been conferred upon them.

"The apostle's great argument is concluded, and the result is placed before us in a very short summary. We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way; and we have in the heavenly sanctuary a great Priest over the house of God. All difficulties have been removed, perfectly and forever. We have access; and He who is the way is also the end of the way; He is even now our great Priest, interceding for us, and our all-sufficient Mediator, providing us with every needful help.

"On this foundation rests a threefold exhortation. 1. Let us draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith. 2. Let us hold fast the profession of hope without wavering. 3. Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, laboring and waiting together, and helping one another in the unity of brethren. Faith, hope, and love—this is the threefold result of Christ's entrance into heaven, spiritually discerned. A believing, hoping, and loving attitude of heart corresponds to the new covenant revelation of Divine grace" (Adolph Saphir).

"In these words the apostle enters on the last part of the epistle, which is wholly hortatory. For though there be some

occasional intermixtures of doctrine consonant to those which are insisted on before, yet the professed design of the whole remainder of the epistle is to propose to, and press on the Hebrews such duties of various sorts, as the truths he had insisted on, do direct unto, and make necessary to all that believe. And in all his exhortations there is a mixture of the ground of the duties exhorted to, of their necessity, and of the privilege which we have in being admitted to them, and accepted with them, all taken from the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, with the effects of them, and the benefits which we receive thereby" (John Owen).

The same order of Truth may be clearly seen in other epistles of the apostle Paul. In Romans, the first eleven chapters are devoted to doctrinal exposition, the next four being practical, setting forth the Christian's duties: see Romans 12:1. Likewise in Ephesians: the first three chapters set forth the sovereign grace of God, the last three the Christian's responsibilities: see Hebrews 4:1. From this the teacher and preacher may gather important instruction, showing him how to handle the Word, so that the whole man may be edified. The understanding needs to be enlightened, the conscience searched and comforted, the heart inflamed, the will moved, the affections well ordered. Nothing but doctrine, will produce a cold and conceited people; nothing but exhortation, a discouraged and ill-instructed people.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (verse 19). "The preceding part of this epistle has been chiefly occupied with stating, proving, and illustrating some of the grand peculiarities of Christian doctrine: and the remaining part of it is entirely devoted to an injunction and enforcement of those duties which naturally result from the foregoing statements. The paragraph verses 19-23, obviously consists of two parts:—a statement of principles, which are taken for granted as having been fully proved; and an injunction of duties grounded on the admission of these principles" (J. Brown).

The great privilege which is here announced unto Christians is that they may draw near unto God as accepted worshippers. This privilege is presented under a recapitulation of the principal points which the apostle had been treating of, namely, first, Christians have liberty to enter the presence of God (verse 19). Second, a way has been prepared for them so to do (verse 20). Third, a Guide is

provided to direct them in that way (verse 21). These three points are here amplified by showing the nature of this "liberty": it is with "boldness," to enter the presence of God, and that by virtue of Christ's blood. The "way" is described as a "new" and "living" one, and it is ready for our use because Christ has "consecrated" it. The "Guide" is presented by His function, "priest"; His dignity, "great"; His authority, "over the house of God."

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." To "enter into the holiest" is, as verse 22 shows, to "draw near" unto God in Christ, for "no one cometh unto the Father but by Him" (John 14:6). The "Holiest" here is only another name for Heaven, the dwelling-place of God, being designated so in this instance because the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the temple was the type thereof. This is established by what was before us in Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, the figures of the true; but into heaven itself." It is most blessed to link with Hebrews 10:19 what is said in Hebrews 9:12: "by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place"; the title of the members of His body for entering in the Sanctuary on high, is the same as that of their Head's!

The boldness to "enter into the holiest" which is spoken of in our text is not to be limited to the Christian's going to heaven at death or at the return of the Savior, but is to be understood as referring to that access unto God in spirit, and by faith, which he now has. Here again we see the tremendous contrast from the conditions obtaining under the old and the new covenants. Under Judaism as such, the Israelites were rigidly excluded from drawing nigh unto Jehovah; His dwelling-place was sealed against them. Nay, even the Levites, privileged as they were to minister in the tabernacle, were barred from the holy of holies. But now the right has been accorded unto all who partake of the blessings of the new covenant, to enjoy free access unto God, to draw near unto His throne as supplicants, to enter His temple as worshippers, to sit at His table as happy children.

Most blessedly was this set forth by Christ in the close of that remarkable parable in Luke 15. There we find the prodigal—having "come to himself"—saying, "I will arise and go to my Father." He arose and went, and where do we find him? Outside the door, or looking in at the window? No, but inside the House.

Sovereign grace had given him boldness to "enter." And why not? Having confessed his sins, he had received the "kiss" of reconciliation, and the "best robe" had been placed upon him, and thus he was fitted to enjoy the Father's house. In perfect accord with our Lord's teaching in that parable, we have been told here in Hebrews 10 that "by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified," and because of this, God has put His laws into their hearts, written them upon their minds, and avowed that their sins and iniquities He would "remember no more."

Here, then, is the force of the "therefore" in our present verse. Inasmuch as Christ's satisfaction has removed every legal obstacle, and inasmuch as the work of the Spirit in the Christian has made him "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12), there is not only nothing to hinder, but every reason and motive to induce us to draw near unto God and pour out our hearts before Him in thanksgiving, praise, and worship. In Hebrews 4:16 we are invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"; but here in Hebrews 10:19-22 it is worship which is more specifically in view—entrance into "the holiest," which was the place of worship and communion, see Numbers 7:89.

A further word of explanation needs to be given on the term "boldness." Saphir rightly pointed out that this expression "must be understood here objectively, not subjectively, else the subsequent exhortation would be meaningless"; in other words, the reference is to something outside ourselves and not to a condition of heart. Literally, the Greek signifies "Having therefore, brethren, boldness for entrance into the holiest," and hence, some have rendered it "the right of entrance." Most probably the word is designed to point a double contrast from conditions under the old covenant. Those under it had a legal prohibition against entering the sacred abode of Jehovah, but Christians have a perfect title to do so. Again, those under Judaism were afraid to do so, whereas faith now perceives that we may come to God with the fullest assurance because He has accepted us "in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). There is no valid reason why we should hesitate to draw near unto our Father in perfect freedom of spirit.

"By the blood of Jesus." This is the meritorious cause which procures the Christian's right of entrance into the "Holiest"—the

place where all the tokens of God's grace and glory are displayed (Heb. 9:3, 4). The blood of the Jewish sacrifices did not and could not obtain such liberty of access into the immediate presence of God. The blood of Jesus has done so, both in respect unto God as an oblation, and in respect unto the consciences of believers by its application. As an oblation or sacrifice, the atonement of Christ has removed every legal obstacle between God and believers. It fulfilled the demands of His law, removed its curse, and broke down the "middle wall of partition"; in token whereof, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, when the Savior expired. So too the Holy Spirit has so applied the efficacy of the blood to the consciences of Christians that they are delivered from a sense of guilt, freed from their dread of God, and enabled to approach Him in a spirit of liberty.

"By a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh" (verse 20). This presents to us the second inducement and encouragement for Christians to avail themselves and make use of the unspeakable privilege which Christ has secured for them. In order to understand these verses, it is necessary to bear in mind that N.T. privileges are here expressed in the O.T. dialect. The highest privilege of fallen man is to have access unto the presence of God, his offended Lord and Sovereign: the only way of approach is through Christ, of whom the tabernacle (and the temple) was an illustrious type. In allusion to those figures Christ is here presented to our faith in a threefold view.

First, as a gate or door, by which we enter into the Holiest. No sooner had Adam sinned, than the door of access to the majesty of God was bolted against him, and all his posterity, the cherubim with the flaming sword standing in his way (Gen. 3:24). But now the flaming sword of justice being quenched in the blood of the Surety (Zech. 13:7), the door of access is again wide open. The infinite wisdom of God has devised a way how His "banished" may be brought home again to His presence. (2 Sam. 14:14), namely, through the satisfaction of Christ.

Second, to encourage us in our approaches to God in Christ. He is also presented to us under the figure of "a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us." "Having told us that we have 'an entrance into the holiest,' he now declares what the way is whereby we may do so. The only way into the holiest under the tabernacle

was a passage with blood through the sanctuary, and then a turning aside of the veil. But the whole church was forbidden the use of this way, and it was appointed for no other end but typically, that in due time there should be a way opened unto believers into the presence of God, which was not yet prepared. And this the apostle describes. 1. From the preparation of it: 'which He hath consecrated.' 2. From the properties of it: it was a 'new and living way.' 3. From the tendency of it, which he expresseth, first, typically, or with respect unto the old way under the tabernacle: it was 'through the veil.' Secondly, in an exposition of that type: 'that is, His flesh.' In the whole, there is a description of the exercise of faith in our access unto God by Christ Jesus" (John Owen).

In the previous verse it was declared that heaven has been opened unto the people of God. But here Christ is set forth more as the antitype of that "ladder" (Gen. 28:12, John 1:51), which, being set up on earth, reaches to heaven. In this respect Christ is styled "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6), for He is the only true "way" which conducts unto God. That "way" is variously referred to in Scripture as the "way of life" (Prov. 10:17), the "way of holiness" (Isa. 35:8), the "good way" (Jer. 6:16), the "way of peace" (Luke 1:79), the "way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). All of these refer to the same thing, namely, the only path unto heaven. Christ Himself is that "way" in a twofold sense: first, when the heart turns away from every other object which competes for the first place in its affections, abandons all confidence in its own righteousness, and lays hold of the Savior. Second, when grace is diligently sought to take Christ as our Exemplar, following "His steps" in the path of unreserved and joyful obedience to God.

The "way" to God is here said to be "a new and living" one. The word for "new" is really "newly slain," for the simple verb "occido" from which it is compounded signifies "to slay." The avenue of approach to God has been opened unto us because Christ was put to death in this way. But this word "new" is not to be taken absolutely, as though this "way" had no existence previously to the death of Christ, for all the O.T. saints had passed along it too. No, it was neither completely "new" as to its contrivance, revelation, or use. Why then is it called "new"? In distinction from the old way of life under the covenant of works, in keeping with the new covenant, because it was now only made fully manifest (Eph. 3:5), and

because of its perennial vigor—it will never grow old.

This "way" unto God is also said to be a "living" one, and this for at least three reasons. First, in opposition unto the way to God under Judaism, which was by the death of an animal, and was the cause of death unto any who used it, excepting the high priest. Second, because of its perpetual efficacy: it is not a lifeless thing, but has a spiritual and vital power in our access to God. Third, because of its effects: it leads to life, and effectually brings us thereunto. "It is called a living way, because all that symbolizes Christ must be represented as possessing vitality. Thus we read of Him as the living stone, the living bread, etc." (Adolph Saphir). Probably this epithet also looks to Christ's resurrection: though slain, the grave could not hold Him; He is now "alive for evermore," and by working in His people repentance, faith, and obedience, conducts them safely through unto life everlasting.

This new and living way unto God has been "consecrated for us" by Christ. It is a path consecrated by Him for the service and salvation of man; a way of access to the eternal sanctuary for the sinner which has been set apart by the Redeemer for this service of men" (A. Barnes). As Christ Himself is the "way," the meaning would be, that He has dedicated Himself for the use of sinners in their dealings with God—"for their sakes I sanctify Myself" (John 17:19). As the "way" is also to be regarded as the path which we are called upon to follow through this world as we journey to heaven, Christ has "consecrated" or fitted it for our use by leaving us an example that we should follow His steps—"when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them" (John 10:4).

"The phrase 'consecrated for us' giveth us to understand that Christ hath made the way to heaven fit for us, and this by His three offices. First, as a Priest, He hath truly dedicated it, and that by His own blood, as by the blood of sacrifices things were consecrated under the law. Christ by His blood has taken away our sins, which made the way to heaven impassible. Second, as a Prophet, He hath revealed and made known this way to us. This He did while He was on earth, by Himself; and since His taking into heaven, He hath done it by His ministers (Eph. 4:11). Third, as a King, He causes the way to be laid out, fenced in, and made common for all His people; so as it may well be styled the King's highway" (William Gouge).

"Through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." It is through the

humanity of Christ that the way to heaven has been opened, renewed and consecrated. But prior to His death, the very life which was lived by the man Christ Jesus only served to emphasize the awful distance which sinners were from God, just as the beautiful veil in the tabernacle shut out the Israelite from His presence. Moreover, the humanity of Christ was a sin-bearing one, for the iniquities of His people had all been imputed to Him. While, then, the flesh of Christ was uncrucified, proof was before the eyes of men that the curse was not abolished. As long as He tabernacled in this world, it was evident that sin was not yet put away. The veil must be rent, Christ must die, before access to God was possible. When God rent the veil of the temple, clear intimation was given that every hindrance had been removed, and that the way was opened into His presence.

"And having an High Priest over the house of God" (verse 21). Here is the third great privilege of the Christian, the third inducement which is presented to him for approaching unto God, the third character in which Christ is presented unto faith. Whereas it might be objected that though the door be opened and a new and living way consecrated, yet we are too impotent to walk therein, or too sinful to enter into the holiest; therefore, to obviate this, Christ is now set forth as Priest over the house of God. O what encouragement is here! As Priest Christ is "ordained for men in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1). He is a living Savior within the veil, interceding for His people, maintaining their interests before the Father.

"And having an High Priest over the house of God." The opening "And" shows that the contents of this verse form a link in the chain begun in verse 19, so that they furnish a further ground to help us in approaching unto God. The next word "having," while not in the Greek, is obviously understood, and as the principal verb (needed to complete the sentence) is fetched from verse 19. The adjective should be rendered "great" and not "high": it is not a relative term, in comparison with other priests; but an absolute one, denoting Christ's dignity and excellency: He is "great" in His person, in His worthiness, in His position, in His power, in His compassion.

To show for whom in particular Christ is the great Priest, it is here added "over the house of God." "The apostle doth not here

consider the sacrifice of Christ, but what He is and doth after His sacrifice, now that He is exalted in heaven; for this was the second part of the office of the high priest. The first was to offer sacrifice for the people, the other was to take the oversight of the house of God: see Zechariah 3:6, 7—Joshua being an eminent type of Christ" (John Owen). The "house of God" represents the whole family of God both of heaven and earth: compare Hebrews 3:6. The church here below is what is first comprised in this expression for it is unto it that this encouragement is given, and unto whom this motive of drawing nigh is proposed. But as it is in the heavenly sanctuary that Christ now ministers, and into which we enter by our prayers and spiritual worship, so the "house of God" includes both the church militant and the church triumphant.

When it is said that Christ is "over the house of God," it is His headship, lordship, authority, which is in view. The Lord Christ presides over the persons, duties, and worship of believers. In that all their acceptable worship is of His appointment; in that He assists the worshippers by His Spirit for the performance of every duty; in that He directs the government of the church, ordains its officers, and administers its laws; in that He makes their service acceptable with God. He is King in Zion, wielding the scepter, protecting the interests of His church, and, according to His pleasure, overthrowing its enemies. It is the Lord who adds to the church those who are to be saved. He is the alone Head, and as the wife is to be subject to her husband in all things, so the members of Christ's mystical body are to own no other Lord. From Him we are to take our orders; unto Him we must yet render an account.

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (verse 22). Having described the threefold privilege which Christians have been granted, the apostle now points out the threefold duty which is entailed; the first of which is here in view, namely, to enter the Holiest, to draw near unto God, as joyful worshippers. To "draw near" unto God is a sacerdotal act, common to all the saints, who are made priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6): the Greek word expressing the whole performance of all Divine worship, approaching unto the Most High to present their praises and petitions, both publicly and privately.

"To draw near to God is an act of the heart or mind, whereby

the soul, under the influence of the Spirit, sweetly, and irresistibly returns to God in Christ as its only center of rest. There is a constant improvement of the merit and mediation of Christ in every address made to the Majesty on high. The believer, as it were, fixes himself in the cleft of the Rock of ages; he gets into the secret place of the blessed stair, by which we ascend unto heaven; and then he lifts up his voice in drawing near to God, by the new and living way. He says with David 'I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.' And if God hides His face, the soul will wait, and bode good at His hand, saying, 'hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him: He will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me.' And if the Lord smiles and grants an answer of peace, he will not ascribe his success to his own faith or fervor, but unto Christ alone" (Condensed from Eben. Erskine, 1733).

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." This is the requisite manner in which we must approach unto God. It is not sufficient to assume a reverent posture of body, or worship with our lips only; nor is God honored when we give way to unbelief. A "true heart" is opposed to a double, doubting, distrustful, and hypocritical heart. All dissimulation is to be avoided in our dealings with Him who "trieth the hearts and the reins" and "whose eyes are like a flame of fire."

God desireth truth in the inward parts, and therefore, "Son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26) is His first demand upon us. Nothing short of this will ever satisfy Him. But more; there must be "a true heart": a sincere, genuine, honest desire and determination to render unto Him that which is His due. We cannot impose upon Him. Beautiful language designed for the ears of men, or emotional earnestness which is only for effect, does not deceive God. "God is spirit; and they that worship Him, must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). How this condemns those who rest satisfied with the mere outward performance of duty, and those who are content to substitute an imposing ritual for real heart dealings with God! O to be able to say with David, "with my whole heart have I sought Thee."

"In full assurance of faith": which means, negatively, without doubting or wavering; positively, with unshaken confidence—not in myself, nor in my faith, but in the merits of Christ, as giving the

unquestionable title to draw near unto the thrice holy God. "Full assurance of faith" points to the heart resting and relying upon the absolute sufficiency of the blood of Christ which was shed for my sins, and the efficacy of His present intercession to maintain my standing before God. Faith looks away from self, and eyes the great Priest, who takes my feeble praise or petitions, and, purifying and perfuming them with His own sweet incense (Rev. 8:3, 4), renders them acceptable to God. But let not Satan deter any timid child of God from drawing near unto Him because fearful that he neither possesses a "true heart" or "full assurance of faith." No, if he cannot consciously come with them, then let him earnestly come unto the throne of grace for them.

"Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Here we have a description of the characters of those who are qualified or fitted to enter the Holiest. A twofold preparation is required in order to draw near unto God: the individual must have been both justified and sanctified. Here those two Divine blessings are referred to under the typical terms which obtained during the old covenant.

"Having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." The Jewish cleansing or "sprinkling" with blood related only to that which was eternal, and could not make the conscience perfect (Heb. 9:9); but the sacrifice of Christ was designed to give peace to the troubled mind and confidence before God. An "evil conscience" is one that accuses of guilt and oppresses because of unpardoned sin. It is by the exercise of faith in the sufficiency of the atoning blood of Christ—the Spirit applying experimentally its efficacious virtue—the conscience is purged. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1): we are freed from a sense of condemnation, and the troubled heart rests in Christ.

"And our bodies washed with pure water." This figurative language is an allusion to the cleansing of the priests when they were consecrated to the service of God (Ex. 29:4). The antitypical fulfillment of this is defined in Titus 3:5 as "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." But here the emphasis is thrown on the outward effects of regeneration upon the daily life of the believer. We need both an internal and an external purification; therefore are we exhorted, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the

fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). The sanctity of the body is emphatically enjoined in Scripture: see Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:16, 20.

The whole of this 22nd verse contains most important teaching on the practical side of communion with God. While the first reference in the cleansing of the conscience and the washing of the body be to the initial experience of the Christian at his new birth, yet they are by no means to be limited thereto. There is a constant cleansing needed, if we are to consciously draw near to the holy God. Daily do we need to confess our sins, that we may be daily pardoned and "cleansed from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). An uneasy conscience is as real a barrier to fellowship with Jehovah, as ceremonial defilement was to a Jew. So too our walk needs to be incessantly washed with the water of the Word (John 13). The Levitical priests were not only washed at the time of induction into their holy office, but were required to wash their hands and feet every time they entered the sacred sanctuary (Ex. 30:19, 20).

It is just at this very point that there is so much sad failure today. There is so little exercise of heart before God; so feeble a realization of His high and holy requirements; so much attempting to rush into His presence without any previous preparation. "Due preparation, by fresh applications of our souls unto the efficacy of the blood of Christ for the purification of our hearts, that we may be meet to draw nigh to God, is required of us. This the apostle hath special respect to, and the want of it is the bane of public worship. Where this is not, there is no due reverence of God, no sanctification of His name, nor any benefit to be expected unto our own souls" (John Owen).

Hebrews 10:23, 24

Chapter 51 - Christian Perseverance

The verses which are now to be before us are a continuation of those which we pondered in our last article, the whole forming a practical application to the doctrine which the apostle had been expounding in the body of this Epistle. In verses 17-21 a summary is given of the inestimable blessings and privileges which Christ has secured for His people, namely, their sins and iniquities being blotted out from before the face of the Judge of all (verses 17, 18), the title to approach unto God as acceptable worshippers (verses 19-21), the Divine provision for their spiritual maintenance: a great Priest over the house of God (verse 21). Then, in verses 22-24 the duties and responsibilities of Christians are briefly epitomized, and that, in such terms as we may the better perceive the intimate connection between the results secured by the great Oblation and the corresponding obligations on its beneficiaries.

The passage we are now engaged with is a hortatory one. As we pointed out in our last, the method which is generally followed by the Holy Spirit is to first display the riches of Divine grace, and then to set forth the response which becomes its objects. So it is here. All that is found in verses 22-24 looks back to and derives its force from the "therefore" at the beginning of verse 19. There is a threefold privilege named: Divine grace has given freedom unto all Christians to approach the heavenly mercy-seat (verse 19); it has bestowed this title through Christ's having "consecrated" for them the way into God's presence (verse 20); and this blessing is permanent, because there abides a great Priest to mediate for them (verse 21). Agreeing thereto, there is a threefold responsibility resting upon the saint, set forth thus: "let us draw near" (verse 22), "let us hold fast the profession of our faith" (verse 23), "let us consider one another to provoke unto love" (verse 24).

The first part of this threefold exhortation matches the first blessing named in the preceding verses: because the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ has made a perfect and effectual atonement for all

the sins of His people, (thereby removing the one great legal barrier which excluded them from the presence of the thrice Holy One), let them freely draw near unto their reconciled God, without fear or doubting. The second part of this exhortation agrees with the second great blessing specified: since Christ has "consecrated for us" a new and living way in which to walk, having left us an example that we should follow His steps, "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." The third member of the composite exhortation corresponds to the third privilege enumerated: since we have a great Priest over the house of God, "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works," and thus conduct ourselves becomingly as in His house.

The order in the three parts of this exhortation calls for our closest attention. The first, treats of our relation to God: the worshipping of Him in spirit and in truth, and in order to do this, the maintaining of a good conscience and the separating of ourselves from all that pollutes. The second, deals with our conduct before men in the world: the refusal to be poisoned by their unbelief and lawlessness, and this by a steady perseverance in the path of duty. The third, defines our responsibility toward fellow-Christians: the mortifying of a selfish spirit, by keeping steadily in view the highest welfare of our brethren and sisters, seeking to encourage them by a godly example, and thus stirring them up unto holy diligence and zeal both God-ward and man-ward. Thus we may see how very comprehensive is the scope of this exhortation, and admire its beautiful arrangement. How much we often miss through failing to carefully note the connection of Scripture!

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: For He is faithful that promised" (verse 23). There is some uncertainty as to the Greek here: some manuscripts having "faith" others "hope"; both the R.V. and Bag. Inter. have "the confession of our (the) hope." It seems to us that the A.V. is to be preferred, for while it is true that if we adopt the alternative, we then have "faith" verse 22, "hope" in verse 23, and "love" in verse 24, yet this is more than offset by the weighty fact that perseverance in the faith is the theme which is steadily followed by the apostle not only throughout the remainder of this 10th chapter, but also throughout the 11th. We shall therefore adhere to our present version, excepting that "confession" is preferable to "profession."

"Let us hold fast the profession of faith without wavering." The duty here pressed is the same as that which the apostle has spoken of in each parenthesis in his argument (compare Hebrews 2:13; 3:6 to Hebrews 4:12; 5:11 to 6:20): the doctrinal section giving force and power unto it. "Faith is here taken in both the principal acceptations of it, namely, that faith whereby we believe, and the faith or doctrine which we do believe. Of both which we make the same profession: of one, as the inward principle; of the other, as the outward rule. This solemn profession of our faith is two-fold: initial, and by the way of continuation in all the acts and duties required thereunto. The first is a solemn giving up of ourselves unto Christ, in a professed subjection unto the Gospel, and the ordinances of Divine worship therein contained" (John Owen).

"Let us hold fast the profession of faith without wavering." Three questions here call for consideration, namely: First, what is meant by "the confession of our faith?" Second, what is signified by "holding it fast?" Third, what is denoted by holding it fast "without wavering?" As the theme here treated of is of such vital importance, and as it is dealt with so very unsatisfactorily by many present-day preachers, we will endeavor to exercise double care as the Spirit is pleased to enable us.

The "confession of our faith" is that solemn acknowledgment which is made by a person when he publicly claims to be a Christian. It is the avowal that he has renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, for Christ. It is the declaration that he disowns his own wisdom, righteousness and will, and receives the Lord Jesus as his Prophet, Priest and King: his Prophet to instruct him in the will of God, his Priest to meet for him the claims of God, his King to administer in and over him the government of God. It is the owning that he hates sin and desires to be delivered from its power and penalty; that he loves holiness and longs to be conformed to the image of God's Son. It is the claiming that he has thrown down the weapons of his warfare against God, and has now completely surrendered to His just demands upon him. It is the testification that he is prepared to deny self, take up his cross daily, and follow that example which Christ has left him as to how to live for God in this world. In a word, it is the publishing abroad that he has from his very heart "received Christ Jesus the Lord" (Col. 2:6). And let it be said plainly and emphatically, that no one acknowledging less than

this is scripturally entitled to be regarded as a Christian.

"The apostle spends the whole remainder of the Epistle in the pressing and confirming of this exhortation, on a compliance wherewith the eternal condition of our souls doth depend. And this he doth, partly by declaring the means whereby we may be helped in the discharge of this duty; partly by denouncing the eternal ruin and sure destruction that will follow the neglect of it; and partly by encouragements from their own former experiences, and the strength of our faith; and partly by evidencing unto us, in a multitude of examples, how we may overcome the difficulty that would occur unto us in this way, with other various cogent reasonings; as we shall see, if God pleaseth, in our progress" (J. Owen).

To "hold fast the confession of our faith" means to continue in and press forward along the path we profess to have entered; and that, notwithstanding all the threats of persecutors, sophistical reasonings of false teachers, and allurements of the world. Your very safety depends upon this, for if you deny the faith you are "worse than an infidel" who has never professed it. God plainly warns us that if after we have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are again entangled therein and overcome, then, "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning: For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Pet. 2:20, 21). It is one thing to make "confession of faith," it is quite another to "hold fast" the same; multitudes do the former, exceedingly few the latter. It is easy to avow myself a Christian, but it is most difficult indeed to live the life of one.

Concerning the force of the Greek word rendered "hold fast," John Owen stated that there is included in the sense of it, "First, a supposition of great difficulty, with danger and opposition against this holding the profession of our faith. Second, the putting forth of the utmost of our strength and endeavors in the defense of it. Third, a constant perseverance in it, denoted by its being termed 'keep' in 1 Corinthians 15:2: possess it with constancy." If our readers could only realize the mighty power and inveterate enmity of those enemies who are seeking to destroy them, none would deem such language too strong. Sin within is ever seeking to vanquish the Christian. The world without is constantly endeavoring to draw him

away from the path of godliness. Our adversary the Devil is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. That wonderful allegory of Bunyan's, by no means overdrew the picture when he represented the pilgrim as being menaced by mighty giants and a dreadful Apollyon, which must either be slain by him, or himself be destroyed by them.

Sad indeed is it to witness so many young professing Christians just starting out on their arduous journey to Heaven, being told that the words "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" apply not to them, but only to the Jews; and that while unfaithfulness on their part will forfeit some "millennial" crown, yet so long as they have accepted Christ as their personal Savior, no matter how they must indulge the flesh or fraternize with the world, Heaven itself cannot be missed. Little wonder that there is now such a deplorably low standard of Christian living among those who listen to such soul-ruinous error. Not so did teachers of the past, who firmly held the eternal security of Christ's redeemed, pervert that blessed truth. No, they preserved the balance, by insisting that God only preserved His people in the path of obedience to Him, and that they who forsake that path make it evident that they are not His people, no matter what their profession, and no matter what past "experience" they had.

To illustrate what we have in mind, an article appearing in a recent issue of a periodical, on the subject of the security of a Christian, begins thus: "The person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who died for all sin on the cross, and has accepted Him as his own personal Savior, is saved. And more, can never again, under any circumstances or conditions whatsoever, no matter what he may do or not do, be lost." Such an unqualified, unguarded, unbalanced statement as that is misleading, and dangerous to the highest degree; the more so, as nothing that follows in the article in any wise modifies it. But more: stated thus, it is unscriptural. God's Word says, "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). And again, "if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die" (Rom. 8:13); that is, die eternally, suffer the "second death," for "life" and "death" throughout the epistle of the Romans is eternal.

Such a statement as the above (made thoroughly in good faith, we doubt not; yet by one who is the unwitting victim of a

school of extremists) leaves completely out of sight the Christian's responsibility, yea, altogether repudiates it. Side by side with the blessed truth of Divine preservation, the Scriptures uniformly put the solemn truth of Christian perseverance. Are the Lord's people told that they are "Kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5)? So are they also exhorted to "keep try heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23); "Keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27); "keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21); "keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). And it is not honest to quote one class of these texts and not quote, with equal diligence and emphasis, the other.

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." The one-sided teaching of a certain school today renders such an exhortation as this, as not only superfluous, but meaningless. If my only concern (as so many are now affirming) is to trust in the finished work of Christ, and rely upon the promise of God to take me to Heaven; if I have committed my soul and its eternal interests into the hands of God, so that it is now only His responsibility to guard and preserve me; then it is quite unnecessary to bid me guard myself. How absurd are the reasonings of men, once they depart from the Truth! As well might I argue that because I have committed my body into the hands of God, and am counting upon Him to keep me in health, that therefore no matter how I neglect the laws of health, no matter what I eat or do not eat, He will infallibly preserve me from sickness and death. Not so; if I drink poison, I shall come to an untimely grave. Likewise, if I live after the flesh, I shall die.

The apostles believed in no mechanical salvation. They busied themselves in "confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). According to the lopsided logic of many teachers today, it is quite unnecessary to exhort Christians to "continue in the faith"; they will do so. But be not wise above what is written, and deem not yourselves to be more consistent than the apostles. They exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23), yea, "persuaded them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43). The beloved Paul held no such views that, because his converts had been genuinely saved there was therefore no need for him to be any further concerned about their eternal welfare: rather did he send

Timothy "to know your faith, lest by some means the Tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain" (1 Thess. 3:5). So Peter warned the saints, "Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Pet. 3:17).

Should we be asked, Then do you no longer believe in the absolute and eternal security of the saints? Our answer is, We do, as it is set forth in Holy Writ; but we most certainly do not believe in that wretched perversion of it which has now become so current and popular. The Christian preservation set forth in God's Word is not merely a remaining on earth for some time after faith and regeneration have been produced, and then being admitted, as a matter of course, to Heaven, without a regard to the moral history of the intervening period. No, Christian perseverance is a continuing in faith and holiness, a remaining steadfast in believing and in bringing forth all the fruits of righteousness. It is persisting in that course which the converted one has entered: a perseverance unto the end in the exercise of faith and in the practice of godliness. Men who are influenced more by selfish considerations of their own safety and security, than they are with God's commands and precepts, His honor and glory, are not Christians at all.

The balance between Divine preservation and human perseverance was well presented by John Owen when he wrote, "It is true our persistency in Christ doth not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence. The unalterableness of our union with Christ, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant of grace, is that which doth and shall eventually secure it. But yet our own diligent endeavor is such an indispensable means for that end, as that without it, it will not be brought about. Diligence and endeavor in this matter are like Paul's mariners, when he was shipwrecked at Melita. God had before given him the lives of all that sailed with him in the ship (Acts 27:24), and he 'believed that it should be even as God had told him.' So now the preservation of their lives depended absolutely on the faithfulness and power of God. But yet, when the mariners began to fly out of the ship, Paul tells the centurion that, unless the men stayed, they could not be saved (verse 31). But what need he think of ship-men, when God had promised and taken upon Himself the preservation of them all? He knew full well that He would preserve them; but yet that He would do so by the use of means.

"If we are in Christ, God hath given us the lives of our souls, and hath taken upon Himself, in His covenant, the preservation of them. But yet we may say, with reference unto the means that He hath appointed, when storms and trials arise, unless we use our diligent endeavors, we cannot be saved. Hence are the many cautions which are given, not only in this epistle, wherein they abound, but in other places of scripture also, that we should take heed of apostasy and falling away; as 'let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. 10:12), 'Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown' (Rev. 3:11)... consider what it is to 'abide in Christ': what watchfulness, what diligence, what endeavor, are required thereunto. Men would have it to be a plant that needs neither watering, manuring, nor pruning, but one which will thrive alone of itself. Is it any wonder if we see so many either decaying or unthrifty professors? and so many that are utterly turned off from their first engagements!" (Vol. 25, pages 171-173).

From the last two sentences quoted above, we may perceive that the same evil against which we are here contending—a carnal security, which Scripture nowhere warrants—had an existence in the palmy days of the Puritans. Verily there is no new thing under the sun! Nearly three hundred years ago that faithful teacher and prince of expositors had to protest against the one-sided perversion of the precious truth of the Divine preservation of the saints. But no wonder: the devil plainly revealed his methods when he pressed upon Christ the Divine promise that God had given His angels charge to "bear Thee up," but the Savior refused to recklessly ignore the requirements of self-preservation! From John Calvin's comments upon John 8:31 we extract the following: "If, therefore, we wish that Christ should reckon us to be His disciples, we must endeavor to persevere."

Scripture, not logic, is our rule of faith; and not one or two statements taken out of their contexts, but the whole analogy of faith. Error is truth perverted, truth distorted, truth out of proportion. To short-sighted human reason there appears to be a clash between Divine justice and Divine mercy, between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, between law and grace, between faith and good works; but he who is really taught of the Spirit, is enabled to discern their perfect consistency. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10) is a puzzling paradox to the carnal mind. To read that the

Son makes His people "free," and yet that He requires them to "take His yoke" upon them, is an enigma unto many. To "rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11) seems a contradiction in terms to some carping minds. No less contradictory appears God's promise to keep His people, and His requiring to keep themselves under pain of eternal damnation. Yet the last mentioned are just as consistent as are the other things referred to throughout this paragraph.

"For He is faithful that promised." At first glance it is not very easy perhaps to perceive the precise relation of these words to the preceding exhortation: that they are added by way of encouragement seems fairly obvious, for the more that we spiritually ponder the veracity of the Promiser, the more will our faith be strengthened; the more we realize that we have to do with One who cannot lie, the greater confidence shall we have in His Word. Instead of being unduly occupied with the difficulties of the way, we need to look off unto Him who has so graciously given us His "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Pet. 1:4) to cheer and gladden us. Yet this hardly explains the immediate connection between the two parts of this verse, nor does it answer the question as to whether or not any particular promise is here in view.

"For He is faithful that promised." Perhaps the bearing which these words have upon the preceding injunction has been brought out as well by A. Barnes as any. "To induce them to hold fast their profession, the apostle adds this additional consideration. God, who had promised eternal life to them, was faithful to all that He had said. The argument here is, (1) That since God is so faithful to us, we ought to be faithful to Him. (2) The fact that He is faithful is an encouragement to us. We are dependent on Him for grace to hold fast our profession. If He were to prove unfaithful, we should have no strength to do it. But this He never does; and we may be assured that all that He has promised He will perform. To the service of such a God, therefore, we should adhere without wavering."

If we compare Hebrews 4:1 and Hebrews 6:15 light is cast upon what specific "promise" is here contemplated. In the former we read, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it"; in the latter we are told, "And so, after he (Abraham) had patiently endured (persevered) he obtained the promise." It is to be most particularly noted that all through this epistle "salvation" is viewed as a future

thing. This is an aspect of salvation (a vitally important one too) which is mostly omitted from present-day preaching and teaching. In the Hebrews (as likewise in the epistles of Peter) the saints are contemplated as being yet in the wilderness, which is the place of testing and of danger. It is only those who diligently heed the solemn warning of Hebrews 3:12 who win through, "Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (verse 24). The opening "And" serves two purposes: it is a plain indication that the contents of this verse are closely related to what has just been before us; it is a pointed intimation that we ought to be as considerate and careful about the spiritual edification of other saints as we are of our own. Thus there are two things here which claim our consideration: the precise nature of the duty enjoined, and the connection between it and the exhortation of verse 23.

"And let us consider one another." There are no fewer than eleven Greek words used in the N.T. which are all rendered by our one English term "consider": four of them being simple verbs, and seven of them compounds for the purpose of particular emphasis. The first signifies the serious observing of a matter: Acts 15:6; the second a careful deliberation: Hebrews 7:4; the third, to narrowly spy or investigate as a watchman: Galatians 6:1; the fourth, to turn a matter over in the mind: 2 Timothy 2:7. The first simple verb is compounded in Acts 12:12 and means to seriously consult with one's self about a matter. The second simple verb is compounded in Hebrews 13:7, and means to diligently review a thing. The fourth simple verb is compounded in Acts 11:6, and means to thoroughly weigh a matter so as to come to a full knowledge of it: this is the one used in our present text. In Mark 6:52 is a different compound: the disciples failed to compare things together. In Hebrews 12:3 another compound signifies to reckon up—all that Christ suffered. In John 11:50 is a similar compound: to reckon thoroughly. In Matthew 6:28 "consider the lilies" means to learn thoroughly so as to be instructed thereby. The practical lesson to be learned from all this is, that the things of God call for our utmost attention.

"And let us consider one another:" let us diligently bear in mind and continually have in view the good of our fellow-pilgrims.

The term "consider" is very emphatic, being the same as in Hebrews 3:1, where we are bidden to "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Christ Jesus." Here it signifies a conscientious care and circumspection over the spiritual estate and welfare of other Christians. They are brethren and sisters in Christ, members of the same family: a tie far nearer and dearer than any earthly one unites you to them and them to you. "Consider" not only their blessed relation to you, but also their circumstances, their trials, their temptations, their infirmities, their needs. Seek grace to be of service, of help, of blessing to them. Remember that they have their conflicts too, their discouragements, their falls: "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:12).

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." Here is expressed the chief design or end of our consideration for one another: it is to provoke or stir up unto the performance of duties; to strengthen zeal, to inflame affections, to excite unto godly living. We are to provoke one another by means of a godly example, by suitable exhortations, by unselfish acts of kindness. We are to fire one another "unto love," which is not a mere sentiment or natural affability, but a holy principle of action, which seeks the highest good of its object. Christian love is righteous, and never winks at sin; it is faithful, which shrinks not from warning or rebuking where such is necessary. "And good works" is to be the issue, the fruit, of godly love. "And this is love, that we walk after His commandments" (2 John 6).

The relation between this exhortation in verse 24 and the one in verse 23 is very intimate. Love and good works are both the effects and evidences of the sincere confession of saving faith, and therefore a diligent attendance unto them is an essential means of constancy in our confession. Christian perseverance is nothing less than a continuance in practical godliness, in the path of obedience to Christ and love unto His brethren. Therefore are we called upon to watch over one another with a view to steadfastness in the faith and fruitfulness in our lives. No Christian liveth unto himself (Rom. 14:7): each one of us is either a help or a hindrance, a blessing or a curse unto those we associate with. Which is it? The Lord stir up both writer and reader to a more unselfish and loving concern for the spiritual good of those who are fellow-members of the same Body.

Hebrews 10:25-27

Chapter 52 - Apostasy

We have now reached one of the most solemn and fear-inspiring passages to be found not only in this epistle, but in all the Word of God. May the Holy Spirit fit each of our hearts to approach it in that godly trembling which becomes those who have within their own hearts the seeds of apostasy. Let it be duly considered at the outset that the verses which are now to be before us were addressed not to those who made no profession of being genuine Christians, but instead, unto them whom the Spirit of truth owned as "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). Nevertheless, He now dehorts them from stepping over the brink of that awful precipice which was before them, and faithfully warns of the certain destruction which would follow did they do so. Instead of replying to this with arguments drawn from the eternal security of God's saints, let us seek grace to honestly face the terrible danger which menaces each of us while we remain in this world of sin, and to use all necessary means to avoid so fearful and fatal a calamity.

In the past, dear reader, there have been thousands who were just as confident that they had been genuinely saved and were truly trusting in the merits of the finished work of Christ to take them safely through to Heaven, as you may be; nevertheless, they are now in the torments of Hell. Their confidence was a carnal one; their "faith," no better than that which the demons have. Their faith was but a natural one which rested on the bare letter of Scripture. It was not a supernatural one, wrought in the heart by God. They were too confident that their faith was a saving one, to thoroughly, searchingly, frequently, test it by the Scriptures, to discover whether or no it was brining forth those fruits which are inseparable from the faith of God's elect. If they read an article like this, they proudly concluded that it belonged to some one else. So cocksure were they that they were born again so many years ago, they refused to heed the command of 2 Corinthians 13:5 "Prove your own selves." And now it is too late. They wasted their day of opportunity, and the

"blackness of darkness" is their portion forever.

In view of this solemn and awful fact, the writer earnestly calls upon himself and each reader to get down before God and sincerely cry, "Search me, O God: reveal me to myself. If I am deceived, undeceive me ere it be eternally too late. Enable me to measure myself faithfully by Thy Word, so that I may discover whether or no my heart has been renewed, whether I have abandoned every course of self-will and truly surrendered to Thee; whether I have so repented that I hate all sin, and fervently long to be free from its power, loathe myself and seek diligently to deny myself; whether my faith is that which overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), or whether it be only a mere notional thing which produces no godly living; whether I am a fruitful branch of the vine, or only a cumberer of the ground; in short, whether I be a new creature in Christ, or only a painted hypocrite." If I have an honest heart, then I am willing, yea anxious to face and know the real truth about myself.

Perhaps some readers are ready to say, I already know the truth about myself: I believe what God's Word tells me: I am a sinner, with no good thing dwelling in me; my only hope is in Christ. Yes, dear friend, but Christ saves His people from their sins. Christ sends His Holy Spirit into their hearts, so that they are radically changed from what they were previously. The Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in the hearts of those He regenerates, and that love is manifested by a deep desire and sincere determination to please Him who loves me. When Christ saves a soul, He saves not only from Hell, but from the power of sin; He delivers him from the dominion of Satan, and from the love of the world; He delivers him from the fear of man, the lusts of the flesh, the love of self. True He has not yet completed this blessed work. True, the sinful nature is not yet eradicated, but one who is saved has been delivered from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14). Salvation is a supernatural thing, which changes the heart, renews the will, transforms the life, so that it is evident to all around that a miracle of grace has been wrought.

Thus, it is not sufficient for me to ask have I repudiated my own righteousness, have I renounced all my good works to fit me for heaven, am I trusting alone to Christ? Many will earnestly and sincerely affirm these things, who yet give no evidence that they

have passed from death unto life. Then what more is necessary for me to ascertain whether or no my faith be a truly saving one? This, there are certain things which "accompany salvation" (Heb. 6:9), things which are inseparable from it; and for these I must look, and be sure I have them. A bundle of wood that sends forth neither heat nor smoke, has no fire under it. A tree, which in summer, bears neither fruit nor leaves, is dead. So a faith which does not issue in godly living, in an obedient walk, in spiritual fruit, is not the faith of God's elect. O my reader, I beg you to diligently and faithfully examine yourself by the light of God's unerring Word. Claim not to be a child of Abraham, unless you do the works of Abraham (John 8:39).

What is apostasy? It is a making shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim. 1:19). It is the heart's departure from the living God (Heb. 3:12). It is a returning to and being overcome by the world, after a previous escape from its pollutions through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:20). There are various steps which precede it. First, there is a looking back (Luke 9:62), like Lot's wife, who though she had outwardly left Sodom, yet her heart was still there. Second, there is a drawing back (Heb. 10:38): the requirements of Christ are too exacting to any longer appeal to the heart. Third, there is a turning back (John 6:66): the path of godliness is too narrow to suit the lustings of the flesh. Fourth, there is a falling back, which is fatal: "that they might go and fall backward, and be broken" (Isa. 28:13).

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some, but exhorting; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (verse 25). This verse forms the transition between the subject of Christian perseverance, treated of in verses 23, 24, and that of apostasy, which is developed in verse 26 and onwards, though it is much more closely related to the latter than to the former. Most of the commentators are astray on this point, through failing to observe the absence of the word "And" at the beginning of it, and because they perceive not the significance of the word "forsake." In reality, the contents of this verse form a faithful warning against apostasy. First, the Hebrews are cautioned against forsaking public worship. Second, it is pointed out that "some" had already done so. Third, they are bidden to exhort one another with increased diligence.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Before attempting exposition of these words, let us first relieve them of a false application which some seek to make of them today. Just as of old Satan made a wrong use of Psalm 91:11, 12 in his tempting of the Savior (Matthew 4:6), so he does with the verse before us. Few are aware of how often the Devil brings a Scripture before our minds. When a Christian is seeking to be out and out for Christ, the Devil will quote to him "Be not righteous overmuch" (Ecclesiastes 7:16); likewise when a child of God resolves to obey 2 Timothy 3:5 and Hebrews 13:13 and separate from all who do not live godly, the Enemy reminds him of "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Romanists used the same text in the early days of the Reformation, and charged Luther and his friends with disobeying this Divine command. But God's Word does not contradict itself: it does not tell us in one place "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14), and here bid the "sheep" to fraternize with "goats." When rightly understood, this verse affords no handle to those who seek to discourage faithfulness to Christ.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." John Owen rightly pointed out that, "There is a synecdoche (a part put for the whole) in the word 'assembling,' and it is put for the whole worship of Christ, because worship was performed in their assemblies; and he that forsakes the assemblies, forsakes the worship of Christ, as some of them did when exposed to danger." What is here dehorted is the total relinquishment of Christianity. It is not "Cease not to attend the assembly," but "forsake not," abandon not the assembling of yourselves together. It is not the sin of sloth or of schism which is here considered, but that of apostasy. If a professing Christian forsook the Christian churches and became a Mohammedan he would disobey this verse; but for one who puts the honor of Christ before everything else, to turn his back upon the so-called churches where He is now so grievously dishonored, is not a failure to comply with its terms.

The Greek word for "Forsake not" is a very strong and emphatic one, being a double compound, and signifies "to abandon in time of danger." It is the word used by the agonizing Redeemer on the Cross, when He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It was used by Him again when He declared, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy

One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). It is the word employed by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." It is found in only one other place in this epistle, where it is in obvious antithesis from the verse now before us: "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Thus it will appear that a total and final abandonment of the public profession of Christianity is what is here warned against.

One may therefore discern how that verse 25 supplies a most appropriate link between verses 23, 24 and verse 26. Verse 25 prescribes another means to enable the wavering Hebrews to remain constant in the Christian faith. If they were to "hold fast the confession of faith without wavering," and if they were to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works," then they must not "forsake the assembling" of themselves together. The word for "assembling together" is a double compound, and occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Thessalonians 2:1: "our gathering together unto Him," that is unto Christ; this also shows that the "assembling together" here is under one Head, and that the "forsaking" is because He has been turned away from.

To enforce the above caution, the apostle adds, "as the manner of some is." The Greek word for "manner" signifies "custom," and is so translated in Luke 2:42. This supplies additional confirmation that the evil against which the Hebrews were dehorted was no mere occasionally absenting themselves from the Christian churches, but a deliberate, fixed and final departure from them. In John 6:66 we read that "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him"; John also wrote of those who "went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19); whilst at the close of his labors Paul had to say "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). So here, some who had made a profession of the Christian faith had now abandoned the same and gone back to Judaism. It was to warn the others against this fatal step that the apostle now wrote as he did—compare 1 Corinthians 10:12, Romans 11:20.

"But exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Here is the positive side of our verse. This is another of the means appointed by God to confirm Christians in their holy confession. To "exhort one another" is a duty to which all Christians are called; alas, how rarely is it performed these evil days.

Yet, from the human side, such failure is hardly to be wondered at. The vast majority of professing Christians wish to be petted and flattered, rather than exhorted and cautioned. Most of them are so hypersensitive that the slightest criticism offends them. One who seeks grace to be faithful and to act in true "love" to those whom he supposes are his brethren and sisters in Christ, has a thankless task before him, so far as man is concerned—he will soon lose nearly all his "friends" (?) and sever the "fellowship" (?) which exists between him and them. But this will only give a little taste of "the fellowship of His sufferings." Hebrews 3:13 is still God's command!

"And so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." There seems little room for doubt that the first reference here is to the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, which was now very nigh, for this epistle was written within less than eight years before Jerusalem was captured by Titus. That terrible catastrophe had been foretold, again and again, by Israel's prophets, and was plainly announced by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21. The approach of that dreadful "day" could be plainly seen or perceived by those possessing spiritual discernment: the continued refusal of the Nation to repent of their murder of Christ, and the abandoning of Christianity for an apostate Judaism by such large numbers, clearly presaged the bursting of the storm of God's judgment. This very fact supplied an additional motive for genuine Christians to remain faithful. The Lord Jesus promised that His followers should be preserved from the destruction of Jerusalem, but only as they attended to His cautions in Luke 21:8, 19, 34, etc., only as they persevered in faith and holiness, Matthew 24:13. The particular motive unto diligence here set before the Hebrews is applicable to other Christians just to the extent that they find themselves in similar circumstances.

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (verse 26). The general truth here set forth is that, Should those who have been converted and become Christians apostatize from Christ their state would be hopeless. This is presented under the following details. First, because of the nature of this sin, namely, a deliberate and final abandonment of the Christian faith. Second, the ones warned against the committal of it. Third, the terrible aggravation of it did such commit it. Fourth, the unpardonableness of it.

"For if we sin willfully." The causal particle whereby this verse is premised has at least a threefold force. First and more immediately, it points the plain and inevitable conclusion from what has just been said in verse 25: they who "forsake" and abandon the Christian assemblies with all that they stand for, commit a sin for which the sacrifice of Christ avails not. Should it be said that Scripture declares "the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin," the reply is, that it only says "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," and none of those spoken of throughout that verse (1 John 1:7) ever commit this sin! Moreover, that very same epistle plainly teaches there is a sin for which the blood of Christ does not avail: see 1 John 5:16. Second, and more generally, a reason is here adduced as to why Christians need to heed the exhortations given in verses 22-25: the duties therein prescribed are the means which God has appointed for preserving His people against this unpardonable crime. Third and more remotely, a solemn warning is here given against a wrong use being made of the precious promise recorded in Hebrews 10:17—that blessed declaration is not designed to encourage a course of carelessness and recklessness.

"For if we sin willfully." "The word sin here is plainly used in a somewhat peculiar sense. It is descriptive not of sin generally, but of a particular kind of sin,—apostasy from the faith and profession of the truth, once known and professed. 'The angels that sinned' are the apostate angels. The apostasy described is not so much an act of apostasy as a state of apostasy. It is not, 'If we have sinned, if we have apostatized'; but 'If we sin, if we apostatize, if we continue in apostasy'" (John Brown). English translators prior to the A.V. read "If we sin willingly," the change being made in 1611, to avoid giving countenance to the supposition that there is no recovery after any voluntary sin. The Greek word will not permit of this change: the only other occurrence of it in 1 Peter 5:2, clearly gives its scope: "Taking the oversight not by constraint, but willingly."

"For if we sin willingly," that is voluntarily, of our own accord, where no constraint is used. The reference is to a definite decision, where an individual deliberately determines to abandon Christ and turn away from God. "In the Jewish law, as is indeed the case everywhere, a distinction is made between sins of oversight, inadvertence, or ignorance (Lev. 4:2, 13, 22; 5:15; Numbers 15:24,

27-29: compare Acts 3:17, 17:30), and sins of presumption, sins that are deliberately and intentionally committed: see Exodus 21:14, Numbers 15:30, Deuteronomy 17:12, Psalm 19:13. The apostle here has reference, evidently, to such a distinction, and means to speak of a decided and deliberate purpose to break away from the restraints and obligations of the Christian religion" (A. Barnes).

"For if we sin willingly," etc. Who are the ones that are here warned against this terrible sin? Who are they that are in danger of committing it? The answer is, all who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus. But are genuine Christians in any such danger? Looked at from the standpoint of God's everlasting covenant, which He made with them in the person of their Sponsor, which covenant is "ordered in all things and sure;"—no. Looked at according to their standing and state in Christ, as those who have been "perfected forever" (Heb. 10:14);—no. But considered as they are in themselves, mutable creatures (as was un-fallen Adam), without any strength of their own;—yes. Viewed as those who still have the sinful nature within them,—yes. Contemplated as those who are yet the objects of Satan's relentless attacks,—yes. But it may be said, "God sees His people only in Christ." Not so, is the reply. Were that the case, He would never chasten (Heb. 12:5-10) us! God views the Christian both in Christ legally and in this world actually. He addresses us as responsible beings (2 Pet. 1:10) and regulates the manifestations of His love for us according to our conduct (John 14:23).

It is to be carefully noted that the apostle Paul did not say, "If ye sin willingly," but "if we," thus including himself. Two reasons may be suggested for this. First, to soften a little the severity of this terrible warning. He shows there is no respect of persons in this matter: were he to commit this dreadful sin himself, he too would suffer the same un-mitigable doom. Hereby he sets all preachers and teachers a godly example. Such was his general custom: compare the "we" in Hebrews 2:3; 3:6, 14; 12:25; and the "us" in Hebrews 4:1, 11! Second, to emphasize the unvarying outworking of this law: no exceptions are made. The apostle includes himself to show that even he himself could not look to escape the Divine vengeance here denounced, if he fell into the sin here described.

"After that we have received the knowledge of the truth." These words not only serve to identify the ones who are cautioned

against apostasy, but are added to emphasize the enormity of the sin. It would not be through ignorance or lack of knowledge, but after being enlightened, they abandoned Christianity. The "Truth" rather than the "Gospel" is here specifically mentioned, so as to heighten the contrast—it is for a lie that Christ is rejected. The word "knowledge" here is a compound and signifies "acknowledgement," and is so rendered in Titus 1:1, Philemon 6. Owen says, "the word is not used any where to express the mere conceptions or notions of the mind about this, but such acknowledgement of it as arises from some sense of its power and excellency." To "receive" this acknowledgement of the truth includes an act of the mind in understanding it, an act of the will in consenting, and an act of the heart in embracing it.

"Wherefore the sin here intended, is plainly a relinquishment and renunciation of the truth of the gospel, and the promises thereof, with all duty thereunto belonging, after we have been convinced of its truth, and avowed its power and excellency. There is no more required but that this be 'willingly': not upon a sudden surprisal and temptation, as Peter denied Christ; not on those compulsions and fears which may work a present dissimulation, without an internal rejection of the Gospel; not through darkness, ignorance making an impression for a season on the minds and reasonings of men: which things, though exceedingly evil and dangerous, may befall them who yet contract not the guilt of this crime. But it is required thereunto, that men who thus sin, do it by choice, and of their own accord, from the internal depravity of their own mind, and an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God; that they do it by, and with the preference of another way of religion, and a resting therein before or above the Gospel" (John Owen).

The un-pardonableness of this sin is affirmed in the words "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." A similar passage, which throws light on our present verse, is found in 1 Samuel 3:14, "And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering forever." As there were certain sins which, in O.T. times, from their heinousness and the high-handed rebellion of their perpetrators, had no sacrifice allowed them, but "died without mercy" (verse 29); so it is now with those who apostatize from Christ: there is no relief appointed for them, no means for the expiation of their sin. They

voluntarily and finally reject the Gospel, forfeit all interest in the sacrifice of Christ.

Ere leaving this verse, let it be said emphatically that there is nothing in it which in anywise conflicts with the blessed truth of the eternal security of God's saints. The apostle did not here say the Hebrews had apostatized, nor did he affirm they would do so. No, instead, he faithfully points out the sure, dreadful, and eternal consequences did they do so. "For IF we sin willingly." It was to keep them from it that he here sets it down by way of supposition, just as in Romans 8:13 he says, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." As to how far a person may go in the taking up of Christianity, and as to what the Spirit may work in him short of actual regeneration, and then that one apostatize, only God knows. And, as to how close a real Christian may come to presumptuous (Ps. 19:13) sinning, and yet remain innocent of "the great transgression," only God can decide. We are only in the place of safety while we maintain the attitude of complete dependency upon the Lord and of unreserved subjection to Him. To indulge the flesh is dangerous; to persist in the course of self-gratification is highly dangerous; and to remain therein unto the end, would be fatal.

"But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (verse 27). The positive punishment of apostates is here announced. "When a man under the law had contracted the guilt of any such sin, as was indispensably capital in its punishment, for the legal expiation thereof no sacrifice was appointed or allowed, such as murder, adultery, blasphemy, he had nothing remaining but a fearful expectation of the execution of the sentence of the law against him. And it is evident that in this context, the apostle argues from the less unto the greater; if it was so, that this was the case of him who so sinned against Moses' law, how much more must it be so with them that sin against the gospel, whose sin is incomparably greater, and the punishment more severe?" (John Owen.)

The Divine punishment which shall be visited upon apostates is first spoken of under the general term "judgment," as in Hebrews 9:27. This signifies that it will be a righteous sentence proportioned unto their awful crime: there will be a full and open trial, with an impartial judicial condemnation of them. The term is also used to express the punishment itself (James 2:13, 2 Peter 2:3): both

meanings are probably included here. There is no mean between pardon and damnation. The sure approach of this judgment is referred to as "a certain fearful looking-for of" it. The word "certain" here signifies something which is not fully defined, as in "a certain woman" (Mark 5:25), "a certain nobleman" (John 4:46): it therefore denotes the "judgment" is inexpressible, such as no human heart can conceive or tongue portray. "Fearful" intimates the punishment will be so dreadful that when men come to apprehend it they are filled with horror and dismay. "Looking-for" shows that the apostates already have an earnest of God's wrath in their consciences even now.

"And fiery indignation," or "fierceness of fire" as in the American R.V., or more literally, "of fire fervor" (Bag. Inter.). This describes more closely the nature of the "judgment" awaiting them. The terms used denote the resistless, tormenting, destroying efficacy of God's terrible wrath, and emphasizes its dreadful fierceness. God is highly incensed against the apostates, and inconceivably and indescribably dreadful will be His dealings with them: it will express and answer to His infinite justice, holiness, and power. "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger against the earth, and His rebuke with flames of fire" (Isa. 66:15). No doubt the reference in our verse is to the final judgment at the last day, and the eternal destruction of God's enemies. A solemn and graphic shadowing forth of this was given by God when His sword and fiery judgment fell upon the Jews in A.D. 70, destroying their church-state by fire and sword.

"Which shall devour the adversaries." There is probably an allusion here to the dreadful fate which overtook Nadab and Abihu, concerning whom it is written "there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them (Lev. 10:2), and also the judgment visited upon Korah, Dathan and Abiram, when "the ground clave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up," so that they went down "alive into the Pit" (Num. 16:30-33). The "adversaries" are those who are actuated by a principle of hostile opposition to Christ and Christianity. They are enemies of God, and God will show Himself to be their Enemy. God's wrath shall "devour them as to all happiness, all blessedness, all hopes, comfort and relief at once; but it shall not consume their being. This is that which this fire shall ever prey upon them, and never utterly

consume them" (John Owen). From such a doom may Divine grace deliver both wrçiter and reader.

Hebrews 10:28-31

Chapter 53 - The Apostates' Doom

The verses which are now to be before us complete the section begun at verse 26, the sum of which is the apostates' doom. They fall naturally into two parts, the one containing a description of their sin; the other, a declaration of their punishment. For the purpose of solemn emphasis, each of these is repeated. In verse 26 the sin itself is mentioned; in the last clause of verse 26 and in verse 27 the punishment of it is affirmed. In verses 28, 29 the apostle confirms the equity of the fore-named judgment by an argument drawn from the Mosaic law, under which he shows the terrible character of the sin which is here in view. In verses 30, 31 he establishes the certainty of the punishment by an appeal to the character of God as revealed in His Word. This repetition in a subject so solemn, is well calculated to awe every thoughtful reader, and ought to produce the most searching effect upon his conscience and heart.

As we have pointed out in preceding articles, this section (verses 26-31) was introduced by the apostle for the purpose of enforcing the exhortation found in verses 22-24, the sum of which is, a call unto Christians to persevere in a state and practice of godliness. Grossly has this passage been perverted by theological factions belonging to two extremes. The one has misused it in the endeavor to bolster up their false doctrine of regenerated people falling from grace and being eternally lost. Without now going into that subject, it is sufficient to say that Hebrews 10:26-31 contains not a word which directly supports the chief contention of the Arminians. What we have in this passage is only hypothetical, "For if we sin willingly," i.e. deliberately, fully, and finally abandon the profession of Christianity—not that the Holy Spirit here says any of the regenerate Hebrews had, or would do so. A similar and still more pointed case is found in those words of Christ's. "Yet ye have not known Him: but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you" (John 8:55).

The second party of those who have misunderstood this passage, are Calvinists possessing more zeal than wisdom. Anxious to maintain their ground against the Arminians, most of them have devoted their energies to show that regenerated Christians do not come within the scope of verse 26 at all; that instead, it treats only of nominal professors, of those having nothing more than a head-knowledge of the Truth, and making merely a lip-profession of the same. And thus has the great Enemy of souls succeeded in getting some of the true servants of God to blunt the sharp edge of this solemn verse, and nullify its searching power over the conscience of the saints. It is sufficient refutation of this theory to point out that the apostle is here addressing those who were "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1), and in the "we" of Hebrews 10:26 included himself! We will not take any notice of a third theory, of modern "dispensationalists," who affirm that none but Jews could commit the sin here mentioned, beyond saying that our space is too valuable to waste in exposing such trifling with Holy Scripture.

But what has been pointed out above presents a serious difficulty to many. We may state it thus: If it be impossible for truly regenerated people to ever perish, then why should the Holy Spirit move the apostle to so much in hypothetically describing the irremediable doom if they should apostatize? Such a difficulty is occasioned, in the first place, through a one-sided conception of the Christian, through considering him only as he exists in the purpose of God, and not also remembering what he still is in himself: unless the latter be steadily held in mind, we are in grave danger of denying, or at least ignoring, the Christian's responsibility. That the Christian is to be viewed in this twofold way is abundantly clear from many Scriptures. For example, in the purpose of God, the Christian is already "glorified" (Rom. 8:30), yet he certainly is not so in himself! Here in Hebrews 10:26 etc. (as in many other passages) the Christian is not addressed from the viewpoint of God's eternal purpose, but as he yet is in himself—in need of solemn warnings, as well as exhortations.

Again; the difficulty which so many one-sided thinkers find in this subject is to be attributed to their failure in duly recognizing the relation which God has appointed between His own eternal counsels and the accomplishment of the same through wisely ordained means. There are some who reason (most superficially)

that if God has ordained a certain soul to be saved, he will be, whether he exercised faith in Christ or no. Not so: 2 Thessalonians 2:13 clearly proves the contrary—the "end" and the "means" are there inseparably joined together. It is quite true that where God has appointed a certain individual "unto salvation," He will infallibly give him a saving faith; but that does not mean that the Holy Spirit will believe for him; no, the individual will, must, exercise the faith which has been given him. In like manner, God has eternally decreed that every regenerated soul shall get safely through to Heaven, yet He certainly has not ordained that any shall do so whether or not they use the means which He has appointed for their preservation. Christians are "kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5)—there is the human responsibility side.

Looked at as he still is in himself, the Christian is eminently liable to "make shipwreck of the faith" (1 Tim. 1:19). He still has within him a nature which craves the vanities of the world, and that craving has to be denied, or he will never reach Heaven. He is yet in the place of terrible danger, menaced by deadly temptations, and it is only as he constantly watches and prays against the same that he is preserved from them. He is the immediate and incessant object of the Devil's malice, for he is ever going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; and it is only as the Christian takes unto himself (appropriates and uses) the armor of God's providing, that he can withstand the great Enemy of souls. It is because of these things that he urgently needs the exhortations and warnings of Holy Writ. God has faithfully pointed out to us what lies at the end of every path of self-will and self-indulgence. God has mercifully placed a hedge across each precipice which confronts the professing Christian, and woe be to him if he disregards those warnings and pushes through that hedge.

In this solemn passage of Hebrews 10, the apostle is pointing out the sure and certain connection there is between apostasy and irrevocable damnation, thereby warning all who bear the name of Christ to take the most careful and constant pains in avoiding that unpardonable sin. To say that real Christians need no such warning because they cannot possibly commit that sin, is, we repeat, to lose sight of the connection which God himself has established between His predestined ends and the means whereby they are reached. The end unto which God has predestined His people is their eternal bliss

in Heaven, and one of the means by which that end is reached, is through their taking heed to the solemn warning He has given against that which would prevent their reaching Heaven. It is not wisdom, but madness, to scoff at those warnings. As well might Joseph have objected that there was no need for him and his family to flee into Egypt (Matthew 2), seeing that it was impossible for the Christ-Child to be slain by Herod!

What each of us needs to watch against is the first buddings of apostasy, the first steps which lead to that sin of sins. It is not reached at a single bound, but is the fatal culmination of a diseased heart. Thus, while the writer and the reader, may be in no immediate danger of apostasy itself, we are of that which, if allowed and continued in, would certainly lead to it. A man who is now enjoying good health is in no immediate danger of dying from tuberculosis; yet if he recklessly exposed himself to the wet and cold, if he refrained from taking that nourishing food which supplies strength to resist disease, or had he a heavy cough on the chest and made no effort to break it up, then would he very likely fall a victim to consumption. So it is spiritually. Nay, in the case of the Christian, the seed of eternal death is already in him. That seed is sin, and it is only as grace is daily and diligently sought, for the thwarting of its inclinations and suppressing of its activities, that it is hindered from fully developing to a fatal end.

A small leak neglected will sink a ship just as effectually as the most boisterous sea. So one sin indulged in and not repented of, will terminate in eternal punishment. Well did John Owen say, "We ought to take heed of every neglect of the person of Christ and of His authority, lest we enter into some degree or other of the guilt of this great offense." Or, still better, well may both writer and reader earnestly cry unto God, "Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Ps. 19:13). Rightly did Spurgeon say on this verse, "Secret sin is a stepping-stone to presumptuous sin, and that is the vestibule of 'the sin which is unto death'" (Treasury of David.) To sin "presumptuously" is to knowingly and deliberately ignore God's commandments, defying His authority and recklessly going on in a course of self-pleasing regardless of consequences. When one has reached that terrible stage, he is but a short step indeed from

committing the sin for which there is no forgiveness, and then to be abandoned by God both in this world and in that which is to come.

As this solemn subject is so vitally related to our eternal welfare, and as the pulpit and religious press of today maintain a guilty silence thereon, let us briefly point out some of the steps which inevitably lead to "presumptuous" sinning. When a professing Christian ceases to maintain a daily repentance and confession to God of all known sins, his conscience is already asleep and no longer responsive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. If over and above this, he comes before God as a worshipper, to praise and thank Him for mercies received, he is but dissembling, and mocking Him. If he continues in a state of impenitence, thus allowing and siding with the sin into which at first, he was unwittingly and unwillingly betrayed, his heart will be so hardened that he will commit new sins deliberately, against light and knowledge, and that with a high hand, and thus be guilty of presumptuous sins, of openly defying God.

The terrible thing is that in these degenerate times the consciences of thousands have been drugged by preachers (whom it is greatly to be feared are themselves spiritually dead, and helping forward the work of Satan) that have presented "the eternal security of the saints" in such an unscriptural way, as to convey to their poor hearers the impression that, provided they once "accepted Christ as their personal Savior" Heaven is now their certain portion, that guilt can nevermore rest upon them, and that no matter what sins they may commit nothing can possibly jeopardize their eternal interests. The consequence has been—and this is no imaginary fear of ours, but a patent fact of observation on every side—that a carnal security has been imparted, so that in the midst of fleshly gratification and worldly living it is, humanly speaking, quite impossible to disturb their false peace or terrify their conscience.

All around us are professing Christians sinning with a high hand against God, and yet suffering from no qualms of conscience. And why? Because while they believe that some "millennial crown" or "reward" may be forfeited should they fail to deny self and daily take up their cross and follow Christ, yet they have not the slightest realization or fear that they are hastening to Hell as swiftly as time wings its flight. They fondly imagine that the blood of Christ covers all their sins. Horrible blasphemy! Dear reader, make no mistake upon this point, and suffer no false prophet to cause you to believe

the contrary, the blood of Christ covers no sins that have not been truly repented of and confessed to God with a broken heart. But presumptuous sins are not easily repented of, for they harden the heart and make it steel itself against God. In proof note, "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent" (Zech. 7:11, 12).

Rightly then does Thomas Scott say on Hebrews 10:26, "We cannot too awfully alarm the secure, self-confident, and presumptuous, as every deliberate sin against light and conscience, is a step towards the tremendous precipice described by the apostle." Alas, alas, Satan has, through the "Bible teachers" done his work so well that, unless the Holy Spirit performs a miracle, it is impossible to "alarm" such. The great masses of professing Christians of our day regard God Himself much as they would an indulgent old man in his dotage, who so loves his grandchildren as to be blind to all their faults. The ineffably holy God of Scripture is no longer believed in: but multitudes will yet find, to their eternal sorrow, that it is "a fearful thing" to fall into His hands. We make no apology for this lengthy introduction, for our aim is not so much to write a commentary on this Epistle, as it is to reach the consciences and hearts of poor, misguided, and deluded souls, who have been fearfully deceived by the very men whom they have regarded as the champions of orthodoxy.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (verses 28, 29). Having named the principal means for the Christian's maintenance of constancy in the faith (verses 22-25), the apostle proceeded to enforce his exhortations to perseverance, and against backsliding and apostasy, by some weighty considerations. First, from the terrible character of the sin of apostasy: it is a sinning willingly after a knowledge of the Truth has been received and assented to verse 26. Second, from the dreadful state of such: no sacrifice avails for them, naught but judgment awaits them, verses 26, 27. Third, from the analogy of God's severity in the past verses

28, 29. Fourth, from what Scripture affirms of God's vindicative justice, verses 30, 31.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." The apostle proceeds to confirm the sentence passed upon the apostate Christian in verses 26, 27, by an appeal to God's awful but righteous justice in the past. If the despiser of the Mosaic law was dealt with so unsparingly, how much more severe must be the punishment meted out to those who scorn the authority of the Gospel! The Greek word for "despise" means to utterly reject a thing, to set aside or cast it off, to treat it with contempt. The one who thus flouted the Divine legislation through Moses, was he who renounced its authority, and determinately and obstinately refused to comply with its requirements. Such an one suffered the capital punishment. Probably such passages as Deuteronomy 13:6-9; 17:2-7 were before the apostle's mind.

"Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" The apostle's inspired logic here is the very reverse of that which obtains in the corrupt theology of present-day Christendom. The popular idea in these degenerate times is that, under the Gospel regime (or "dispensation of grace") God has acted, is acting, and will act much more mildly with transgressors, than He did under the Mosaic economy. The very opposite is the truth. No judgment from Heaven one-half as severe as that which overtook Jerusalem in A.D. 70, is recorded in Scripture from Exodus 19 to Malachi 4! Nor is there anything in God's dealings with Israel during O.T. times which can begin to compare with the awful severity of His "wrath" as depicted in the book of Revelation! Every despiser of the Lordship of Christ shall yet discover that a far hotter place has been reserved for him in Hell, than what will be the portion of lawless rebels who lived under the old covenant.

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" There are degrees of heinousness in sinning (John 19:11), and so there are degrees in the punishment of their perpetrators (Luke 12:47, 48). Here, this solemn truth is presented in the interrogative form (cf. Hebrews 2:3) so as to search the conscience of each reader. If I have been favored with a knowledge of the Gospel (denied to half the human race), if I have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit

(which is more than multitudes of Romanists are), if I profess to have received Christ as my Savior and have praised Him for His redeeming grace,—what punishment can fitly meet my crimes if I now despise His lordship, flout His authority, break His commandments, walk with His enemies, and go on sinning presumptuously, till I end by committing the "great transgression?"

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" Instead of contenting himself with a general declaration of the equity of God's dealings with apostates, the apostle here adduces additional particulars of the crime before him. In this verse we have brought before us the awful aggravations of the sin of apostasy, showing what is implied and involved in this un-pardoned transgression. Three things are specified, at each of which we shall briefly glance.

First, "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God." Once more we would call attention to the varied manner in which the Holy Spirit refers to the Savior in this epistle. Here, it is not "Jesus," or "Christ," but the "Son of God," and that, because His purpose is to emphasize the infinite dignity of the One slighted. It is not a mere man, nor even an angel, but none less than the second person of the Holy Trinity who is so grievously insulted! Backsliding and apostasy is a treating of the Lord of glory with the utmost contempt. What could be worse? The figure here employed is very expressive and solemn: to "tread under foot" is the basest use to which a thing can be put. It signifies a scornful spurning of an object as a thing that is worthless, and is applied to swine trampling pearls under their feet (Matthew 7:6). O my reader, when we deliberately ignore the claims of God's Son and despise His commandments, we are treading His authority beneath our feet!

Second, "and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, an unholy thing." Here, as J. Owen rightly pointed out, "The second aggravation of the sin spoken of, is its opposition to the office of Christ, especially His priestly office, and the sacrifice He offered thereby, called here 'the blood of the covenant'." In our exposition of chapter 9, we sought to show in what sense the blood of Christ was "the blood of the covenant." It

was that whereby the new covenant and testament was confirmed and made effectual unto all its grace, to those who believe; being the foundation of all God's actings toward Christ in His resurrection, exaltation and intercession—cf. Hebrews 13:20. Now the backslider and apostate does, by his conduct, treat that precious blood as though it were a worthless thing. There are many degrees of this frightful sin. But O my reader, whenever we give rein to our lusts and are not constrained by the love of Christ to render Him that devotion and obedience which are His due, we are, in fact, despising the blood of the covenant.

Third, "and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." This is the greatest aggravation of all: "whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him" (Luke 12:10). It is by the Spirit the Christian was regenerated, enlightened, convicted, and brought to Christ. It is by the Spirit the Christian is led and fed, taught and sanctified. What reverence is due Him as a Divine person! What gratitude as a Divine benefactor! How dreadful the sin then which treats Him with insolence, which scorns to attend unto His winsome voice, which despises His gracious entreaties! While the grossest form of the sin here referred to is, malignantly imputing unto Satan the works of the Spirit, yet there are milder degrees of it. O my reader, let us earnestly endeavor to keep from grieving Him (Eph. 4:30), and more completely yield ourselves to be "led" (Rom. 8:14) by Him along the highway of practical holiness.

Saith the Lord Almighty, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor (in spirit), and of a contrite heart, and trembleth at My Word" (Isa. 66:2). Surely if there is a passage any where in Holy Writ which should cause each of us to "tremble," it is the one now before us! Not tremble lest we have already committed this unpardonable sin, for they who have done so are beyond all exercise of conscience, being given up by God to hardness of heart; no, but tremble lest we should begin a course of backsliding, which, if unarrested, would certainly lead thereto. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). O my reader, make this your daily prayer, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not" (Ps. 17:5).

"For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto

Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people" (verse 30). In this verse further confirmation is supplied of the awful severity and the absolute certainty of the punishment of apostates. Once more we have an example of a most important principle which regulated the apostle in his ministry, both oral and written. In verses 28, 29 he had given a specimen of spiritual reasoning, drawing a clear and logical inference from the less to the greater; yet decisive and unanswerable as this was, he rested not his case upon it, but instead, established it by quoting from Holy Scriptures. Let servants of God today act upon the same principle, and give a definite "Thus saith the Lord" for all they advance.

"For we know Him that hath said." Here our attention is directed unto the Divine character, what God is in Himself. Nothing behooves us more than to frequently and fully consider who it is with whom we have to do. Our conception of the Divine character plays an important part in molding our hearts and regulating our conduct, therefore it is that we find the apostle, in another place, praying that the saints may be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). It is a most profitable exercise for the soul to be often engaged in contemplating the Divine attributes, pondering God's all-mighty power, ineffable holiness, unimpeachable veracity, exact justice, absolute faithfulness and terrible severity. Christ Himself has bidden us "Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). The better God's character be known, the more we heed that exhortation of Christ's, the clearer shall we perceive that there is nothing unsuited to the holiness of God in what Scripture affirms concerning His dealings with the wicked. It is because the true nature of sin is so little viewed in the light of God's awful holiness, that so many fail to recognize its infinite demerits.

"For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense saith the Lord." The reference is to Deuteronomy 32:35, though the apostle does not quote word for word as we now have that text. Moses was there reminding of the office which God holds as the Judge of all the earth: as such, He enforces His righteous law, and inflicts its just punishment on willful and impenitent sinners. Though, in His unsearchable wisdom, He is often pleased to forbear for a while—for He "bears with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22)

— nevertheless, God will yet pay to every transgressor the full wages to which their sins have earned. God bore long with the Antediluvians, but at the end He destroyed them by the flood. Wondrous was His patience toward the Sodomites, but at His appointed season, He rained down fire and brimstone upon them. With amazing forbearance He tolerates the immeasurable wickedness of the world, but the Day is swiftly approaching when He will avenge Himself upon all who now so stoutly oppose Him.

"And again, The Lord shall judge His people." A most important example is here given as a guide to teach us how scripture is to be applied. The reference is to what is recorded in Deuteronomy 32:36, but there it is God's care exercised on behalf of His people, while here it is His vengeance upon their enemies. Some have caviled at the appositeness of the apostle's quotation. Yet they should not. Each particular scripture has a general application, and is not to be limited unto those first addressed. If God undertakes to protect His people, He will certainly exercise judgment on those who apostatize. He did so in the past (see 1 Corinthians 10:5); He will do so in the future: 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8. The rule which is established by this quotation from Deuteronomy is, that all Scripture is equally applicable unto all cases of the like nature. What God says concerning those who are the enemies of His people, becomes applicable to His people should they break and reject His covenant.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (verse 31). Here is the un-escapable conclusion which must be drawn from all that has been before us. This word "fearful" ought to make every trifler with sin tremble as did Belshazzar when he saw the Hand writing upon the wall. To "fall into the hands of" is a metaphor, denoting the utter helplessness of the victim when captured by his enemy. The One into whose hands the apostate falls is "the living God." "A mortal man, however incensed he may be, cannot carry his vengeance beyond death; but God's power is not bounded by so narrow limits" (John Calvin). No, forever and ever will God's wrath burn against the objects of His judgment. Nor will the supplications of sinners prevail upon Him: see Proverbs 1:28, Ezekiel 8:18.

By the penitent and obedient, God is loved and adored; but by the impenitent and defiant, He is to be dreaded. The wicked may now pride themselves that in the day of judgment they will placate

God by their tears, but they will then find that not only His justice, but His outraged mercy also calls aloud for His vengeance upon them. Men may now be beguiled by visions of a "larger hope," but in that Day they shall discover it is only another of Satan's lies. O how the "terror of the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:11) ought to stir up God's servants to warn and persuade men before the day of grace is finally closed. And how it should make each one of us walk softly before God, sparing no pains to make our calling and election "sure." It is only as we "add" to our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love, that we have scriptural assurance that we shall "never fall" (2 Pet. 1:5-10).

Hebrews 10:32-34

Chapter 54 - The Path of Tribulation

God has not promised His people a smooth path through this world; instead, He has ordained that "we must through much tribulation" enter His kingdom (Acts 14:22). Why should it be otherwise, seeing we are now in a territory which is under His curse. And what has brought down that curse, but sin. Seeing then that there still is a world of sin both without and within each one of us, why should it be thought strange if we are made to taste the bitterness of its products! Suppose it were otherwise, what would be the effect? Suppose this present life were free from sorrows, sufferings, separations; ah, would we not be content with our present portion? Wisely then has God ordered it that we should be constantly reminded of the fact "this is not your rest, because it is polluted" (Mic. 2:10). Trials and tribulations are needful if there is to be wrought in us "a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23).

The word "tribulation" is derived from the Latin "tribulum," which was a flail used by the Romans to separate the wheat from the chaff. How much "chaff" remains even in the one who has been genuinely converted! How much of the "flesh" mingles with and mars his spiritual exercises! How much which is merely "natural" is mixed with his youthful zeal and energetic activities! How much of carnal wisdom and leaning unto our own understanding there is, till God is pleased to deepen His work of grace in the soul! And one of the principal instruments which He employs in that blessed work is the "tribulum" or flail. By means of sore disappointments, thwarted plans, inward fightings, painful afflictions, does He "take forth the precious from the vile" (Jer. 15:19), and remove the dross from the pure gold. It is by weaning us from the things of earth that He fits us for setting our affections on things above. It is by drying up creature-streams of satisfaction that He makes His children thirst for the Fountain of living water.

"Tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3). Patience is a

grace which has both a passive and an active side. Passively, it is a meekly bowing to the sovereign pleasure of God, a saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it"? (John 18:11). Actively, it is a steady perseverance in the path of duty. This is one of the great ends which God has in view in the afflicting of His children: to effect in them "a meek and quiet spirit." "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience." It is one thing to obtain a theoretical knowledge of a truth by means of reading, it is quite another to have a real and inward acquaintance with the same. As the tried and tempest-tossed soul bows meekly to the providential dealings of God, he experimentally learns what is "that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). "And experience, hope," which is a firm expectation of a continuance of sustaining grace and final glory. Since then our sufferings are one of the means which God has appointed for the Christian's sanctification, preparing us for usefulness here, and for Heaven hereafter, let us glory in them.

But let us lift our thoughts still higher. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:3). Ah, it is unto His image which the saint is predestined to be conformed (Rom. 8:29), first in suffering, and then in glory. Let each troubled and groaning child of God call to remembrance the afflictions through which the Man of sorrows passed! Is it not fitting that the servant should drink of the cup which his Master drank? O my brethren, the highest honor God confers upon any of us in this life, is when He permits us to suffer a little for Christ's sake. O for grace to say with the beloved apostle, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye" (1 Pet. 4:14).

"No man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. 3:3). Yet afflictions do not come upon all saints in the same form, nor to the same degree. God is sovereign in this, as in everything else. He knows what will best promote the spiritual good of His people. All is ordered by Him in infinite wisdom and infinite love. As has been well said, "God had one Son without sin, but none without sorrow." Yet the sorrow is not unmixed: God tempers His winds unto the lambs. With every temptation or trial He provides a way to escape.

In the midst of sorest trouble His all-suffering grace is available. The promise is sure, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" (Ps. 55:22), and where faith is enabled to rest in the Lord, His sustaining power is realized in the soul.

Afflictions are not all that the Lord sends His people: He daily loadeth them with His benefits (Ps. 68:19). The smilings of His face greatly outnumber the frowns of His providence. There are far more sunny days than cloudy ones. But our memories are fickle: when we enter the Wilderness, we so quickly forget our exodus from Egypt, and deliverance at the Red Sea. When water gives out (Ex. 17), we fail to call to remembrance the miraculous supply of manna (Ex. 16). It was thus with the apostles. When they had forgotten to take bread, the Lord Jesus tenderly remonstrated with them, saying, "O ye of little faith... Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?" (Matthew 16:5-10). O how much peace and joy we lose in the present through our sinful failure in not calling to remembrance the Lord's past deliverances and mercies.

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee" (Deut. 8:2). Sit down and review God's previous dealings with thee: bring before your hearts His tender patience, His unchanging faithfulness, His powerful interpositions, His gracious gifts. There have been times in the past when your own folly brought you into deep waters of trouble, but God did not cast you off. You fretted and murmured, but God did not abandon you. You were full of fears and unbelief, yet God suffered you not to starve. He neither dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. Instead, He proved Himself to be unto you the "God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10). There were times in the past when every door of hope seemed fast closed, when every man's hand and heart appeared to be against you, when the Enemy came in like a flood, and it looked very much as though you would be drowned. But help was at hand. In the fourth watch of the night the Lord Jesus appeared on the waters, and you were delivered. Then remember this, and let the realization of past deliverances comfort and stay your heart in the midst of the present emergency.

Many are the appeals made unto us in the Word of God to do this very thing. Varied and numerous are the motives employed by

the Holy Spirit in the Scripture of Truth to stir up God's children unto constancy of heart and the performance of duty when "circumstances" seem to be all against them. Every attribute of God is made a distinct ground for urging us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The promises of God are given to cheer, and His warnings stir up our hearts unto a fuller compliance with His revealed will. Rewards are promised to those who overcome the flesh, the world, and the Devil, while eternal woes are threatened unto those failing to do so. Faith is to be stimulated by the record given of God's grace which sustained fellow-pilgrims in by-gone days; hope is to be stirred into action by the glorious Goal which the Word holds up to view. And, as we have said, fresh courage for the present is to be drawn by us from calling to mind God's goodness in the past. It is this particular motive which the apostle pressed on the Hebrews in the passage which is now before us.

"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions" (verse 32). In verses 16-21 the apostle had given a brief summary of the inestimable privileges which are the present portion of the regenerated people of God. In verses 22-24 he had exhorted them to make a suitable response to such blessings. In verses 25-31 he had fortified their minds against temptations to apostasy, or to willful and presumptuous sins. He now bids them to recall the earlier days of their profession, and to consider what they had already ventured, suffered and renounced for Christ, and how they had been supernaturally sustained under their trials: the force of this was, disgrace not your former conduct by now casting away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward.

"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated." The beginnings of God's work of grace in their souls is here spoken of as being "illuminated." The Holy Spirit had revealed to them their depravity and impotency, their lost and miserable state by nature. He had brought before them the unchanging demands of God's righteous law, and their utter failure to meet those claims. He had pointed them to the Lord Jesus, who, as the Sponsor and Surety of His people, had assumed all their liabilities, kept the law in their stead, and died for their sins. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, had "shined into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of

God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Thus He had granted unto them an experimental acquaintance with the Gospel, so that they had felt in their own consciences and hearts the power of its truth. How unspeakably solemn is it to note that this too had been the experience of the apostates in Hebrews 6:4-6, for the very word here rendered "illuminated" is there translated, "enlightened."

Right after their illumination by God, they were called upon to feel something of the rage of His enemies. At the beginning of this dispensation those who made profession of Christianity were hotly persecuted, and the believing Hebrews had not escaped. This the apostle would remind them of: "After ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." As soon as God had quickened their hearts and shone upon their understandings so that they embraced His incarnate Son as their Lord and Savior, earth and hell combined against them. By nature we are in the dark, and while in it we meet with no opposition from Satan or the world; but when, by grace we determined to follow the example which Christ has left us, we were soon brought into the fellowship of His sufferings. By such experiences we are reminded that God has called us to the combat, that as good soldiers of Jesus Christ we are to "endure hardness" (2 Tim. 2:3), and need to take unto ourselves the armor which God has provided (Eph. 6:10-18)—not to speculate about, but to use it.

The attitude toward and the conduct of the Hebrew Christians under this "great fight of afflictions" during the days of their "first love," is here summed up, first, in the one word "endured." They had not fainted or given way to despondency, nor had they renounced their profession. They failed in no part of the conflict, but came off conquerors. This they had been enabled unto by the efficacious grace of God. They had been wondrously and blessedly supported under their sufferings. From Acts 8 we learn that when the church at Jerusalem was sorely persecuted, its members so far from abandoning Christianity, were scattered abroad, and "went everywhere preaching the Word" (verse 4). How greatly was the Captain of their salvation honored by this valor of His soldiers. It is a noticeable fact of history that babes in Christ have often been the bravest of all in facing suffering and death: perhaps because the great and glorious change involved in the passing from death unto life is fresher in their minds than in that of older Christians. Now it was to the recollection of these things unto

which the apostles here called the flagging and tempted Hebrews.

"But call to remembrance." "It is not the bare remembrance he intends, for it is impossible men should absolutely forget such a season. Men are apt enough to remember the times of their sufferings, especially such as are here mentioned, accompanied with all sorts of injurious treatments from men. But the apostle would have them so call to mind, as to consider withal, what support they had under their sufferings, what satisfaction in them, what deliverance from them, that they might not despond upon the approach of the like trials and evils on the same account. If we remember our sufferings only as unto what is evil and afflictive in them, what we lose, what we endure, and undergo; such a remembrance will weaken and dispirit us, as unto our future trials. Hereon many cast about to deliver themselves for the future, by undue means and sinful compliances, in a desertion of their profession; the thing the apostle was jealous of concerning these Hebrews. But if, withal, we call to mind what was the Cause for which we suffered; the honor that is in such sufferings, outbalancing all the contempt and reproaches of the world; the presence of God enjoyed in them; and the reward proposed unto us; the calling these things to mind, will greatly strengthen us against future trials; provided we retain the same love unto, and valuation of the things for which we suffered, as we had in those former days" (John Owen).

"The remembrance then of past warfare, if it had been carried on faithfully and diligently under the banner of Christ, is at length useful to us, not as a pretext for sloth, as though we had already served our time, but to render us more active in finishing the remaining part of our course. For Christ has not enlisted us on this condition, that we should after a few years ask for a discharge, like soldiers who have served their time, but that we should pursue our warfare even unto the end" (John Calvin). It therefore becomes a solemn and searching question for each of us to face: to what extent am I now being antagonized by the world? Something must be seriously wrong with me if I have the goodwill of everybody. God's Word emphatically declares, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

"Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions

of them that were so used" (verse 33). In this verse the apostle mentions one or two features of what their "great fight of affliction" had consisted. Some of them were made a public spectacle to their neighbors, by the malicious accusations brought against them, and by the derision and punishment laid upon them; while others were the "partners" of those who were also cruelly treated. The principal reference here is to the loss which they had sustained in their characters and reputations, and unto many people (especially those of a sensitive temperament) this is a sore trial; almost anything is easier to bear than obloquy and disgrace. But sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master: they slandered Him, and said He had a demon.

Reproach and slander are exceedingly trying, and if we are not upon our guard, if we fail to gird up the loins of our minds (1 Pet. 1:13), we are likely to be so cast down by them as to be incapacitated for duty. Despondency and despair are never excusable in the Christian, and must be steadily resisted. We need to make up our minds that if, by grace, we are determined to follow the example which Christ has left us we shall have many enemies—especially in the religious world—who will scruple at no misrepresentations of our motives and actions. We must learn to undervalue our reputations, and be content to be regarded as "the off-scouring of all things"; we must seek grace to emulate Him who "set His face like a flint" (Isa. 50:7), who "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). Unless we cultivate His spirit we shall be at a great disadvantage when sufferings come upon us.

Not only had the Hebrew Christians suffered personally, but they had fellowship also in the sufferings of others. This is a Christian duty, and, we may add, a privilege. As members of the same Family, as fellow-pilgrims toward the better Country, as called to serve together under the same Banner, it is only meet that we should bear "one another's burdens," and "weep with them that weep." Of Moses it is recorded that "He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:24, 25). To be a companion of those who suffer for Christ, is an evidence of our love for His brethren, of courage in suffering, and of readiness to succor those who are persecuted because of the Gospel. We do well to frequently ponder Matthew 25:42-45.

"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds" (verse 34). The apostle here makes grateful acknowledgment of the sympathy which the Hebrews had shown him in an hour of need. The historical reference may be to the time when he lay bound in chains at Jerusalem (Acts 21:33), when their love for him was shown by their prayers, and perhaps letters and gifts. It is the bounden duty for Christians to express in a practical way their compassion for any of Christ's suffering servants, doing everything in their power to succor, support and relieve them. Equally so is it the duty of God's ministers to thankfully own the kindness shown them: Christ himself will yet publicly bear witness unto the services of love which have been shown unto His brethren (Matthew 25:34-40).

"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds." These words supply one of the many proofs that the apostle Paul was the author of this Epistle, for of the other persons whom some have fancied wrote it, such as Luke, Barnabas, Clement etc., there is no hint anywhere in Scripture, nor we believe in ecclesiastical history, of any of them suffering bonds in Judea. But the lying of Paul in bonds and imprisonments, was renowned above all others. Hence he styled himself in particular "Paul, prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Philem. 1:1), and gloried in this peculiar honor as "an ambassador in bonds" (Eph. 6:20), and as such, desired the saints at Colosse to remember him at the throne of grace (Heb. 4:3). Thus, his "bonds" being above all others so familiar, such a subject of the churches' prayers, this reference here in Hebrews 10:34 at once identifies the writer.

"And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods" (verse 34). This supplies further information upon the deportment of the Hebrews under their trials: they had not only patiently "endured" the great fight of affliction, but were happy in being counted worthy to suffer for Christ—a blessed triumph was that of the mighty grace of God over the weakness of the flesh. God is able to strengthen in the inner man "with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering, with joyfulness" (Col. 1:11). Ordinarily, few things are more calculated to distress the minds of men than their being cruelly plundered of those things for which they have labored hard, and which they and their families still need: wailing and lamentations commonly accompany them. Blessed is it when the heart is brought to hold lightly all earthly comforts and conveniences, for it is easier then to part with them should we be

called upon to do so.

"Knowing in yourselves that we have in heaven a better and enduring substance" (verse 34). This clause supplies the key to the previous one, showing the ground of their joy. Faith looked away from things seen to those unseen, reckoning that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18); "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). Where the heart's affections are truly set upon things above (Col. 3:2), few tears will be shed over the loss of any earthly baubles. True, it is natural to mourn when rudely deprived of material possessions, but it is supernatural to rise above such grieving.

The true riches of the Christian are not accessible to human or Satanic plunderers. Men may strip us of all our worldly possessions, but they cannot take from us the love of God, the salvation of Christ, the comforts of the Holy Spirit, the hope of eternal glory. Said one who was waylaid by a bandit, who demanded his money or his life: "Money, I have none on me; my life is hid with Christ in God." The poor worldling may give way to despair when business is bad, bonds deteriorate, and banks smash, but no child of God ought ever to do so: he has been begotten unto an inheritance which is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4). Yet it is only as faith is in exercise, as the heart is really occupied with our heavenly portion, that we enjoy them, and regard all else as but "vanity and vexation of spirit."

"What was it that enabled them thus to bear up under their sufferings? They knew in themselves that they had in heaven a better and a more enduring substance. Observe, First; the happiness of the saints in heaven is 'substance,' something of real weight and worth—all things here are but shadows. Secondly, it is a better substance than anything they can have or lose here. Thirdly, it is an enduring substance; it will outlive time, and run parallel with eternity. They can never spend it; their enemies can never take it from them as they did their earthly goods. Fourthly, this will make a rich amends for all they can lose and suffer here. In heaven they shall have a better life, a better estate, better liberty, better society, better hearts, better work, everything better" (Matthew Henry).

"Knowing in yourselves that we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." Let us now weigh carefully the first three words of this clause: these Hebrew saints had a firm conviction of heart concerning their heavenly portion. It does not say, "knowing from God's promises," but "knowing in yourselves." This presents a side of the Truth, an aspect of Christian assurance, which is rarely dwelt upon in these days; instead, it is widely ridiculed and denied, many insisting that the only basis of assurance is the bare letter of Scripture. It is quite true that the foundation of our confidence is the written Word, but that is not the only ground, any more than a marriage certificate is the sole proof which a woman has that the man who loves, cherishes, and lives with her, is her husband. No, one has only to read impartially through the first Epistle of John in order to discover that he who is walking with God and enjoying the light of His countenance, has many evidences that he is a new creature in Christ Jesus.

"Knowing in yourselves." The one who is following on to know the Lord (Hos. 6:3), not only has the testimony of God's Word without, but he has also the witness of the Spirit within him, that he is a child and heir of God (Rom. 8:16, 17). In his regeneration and begun experimental sanctification, he has received "the first-fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). In consequence, he now has new desires, new conflicts, new joys, new sorrows. Faith purifies his heart (Acts 15:9). He has received the Spirit of adoption, whereby he cries "Abba Father." From what he finds in his own heart, he knows that he is heaven-born and heaven-bound. Let those who are strangers to a supernatural work of grace in their own hearts mock and scoff all they please, let them sneer at introspection, call it mysticism, or any thing else they wish, but one who is scripturally assured of the Spirit's work within him, refuses to be laughed-out of his surest proof that he is a child of God.

Granted that many have been and are deluded: acknowledging that the unregenerate heart is "deceitful above all things"; admitting that the Devil has lulled thousands into hell by means of happy feelings within them; yet none of these things alter or affect to the slightest degree the fact that it is both the duty and privilege of every genuine Christian to know in himself that he has passed from death unto life. Provided he be denying self, taking up his cross, and following Christ in the path of obedience, he will have

cause for rejoicing in the testimony of a good conscience (2 Cor. 1:12). But if he yields to lusts of the flesh, fellowships with an ungodly world, and gets into a backslidden state, then the joy of his salvation will be lost. Nothing then is of greater practical importance than that the Christian should keep clean and unstained his inward evidences that he is journeying toward heaven.

"Such, then, are the things which the apostle wishes the Hebrew Christians to 'call to remembrance.' It is easy to see how the calling of these things to remembrance was calculated to serve his purpose—to guard them from apostasy, and establish them in the faith and profession of the Gospel. It is as if he had said, 'Why shrink from suffering for Christianity now? Were you not exposed to suffering from the beginning? When you first became Christians, did you not willingly undergo sufferings on account of it? And is not Christianity as worthy of being suffered for as ever? Is not Jesus the same yesterday, and today, and forever? Did not the faith and hope of Christianity formerly support you under your sufferings, and make you feel that they were but the light afflictions of a moment? and are they not as able to support you now as then? Has the substance in heaven become less real, or less enduring? and have you not as good evidence now as you had then that to the persevering Christian such treasure is laid up? Are you willing to lose all the benefit of the sacrifices you have made, and the sufferings you have sustained? and they will all go for nothing if you endure not unto the end!' These are considerations all naturally suggested by the words of the apostle, and all well calculated to induce them 'to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering'." (John Brown).

Hebrews 10:35-39

Chapter 55 - The Saving of the Soul

As there is so much ground covered by the verses which are now to be before us, we shall dispense with our usual introductory paragraphs. In lieu of them, we present a brief analysis of the present passage. Verse 35 really belongs to the section which we took up in our last article. In verses 32-35 the apostle gives a persuasion unto perseverance in the Christian life. First, he bids the Hebrews call to remembrance what they had suffered for Christ's sake in days gone by: then let them not now renounce their faith and thereby render void their early witness—verses 32, 33. Second, he reminded them of the ground on which they had willingly suffered hardships and losses, namely, because they had the inward assurance and evidence that in Heaven they had a better and enduring substance: then, inasmuch as it changed not, why should they?—verse 34. From these facts, the conclusion is drawn that a duty is rightly required from them, upon the performance of which the reward should be given them—verse 35.

In the last section of Hebrews 10 the apostle first confirms the exhortation he had just insisted on, and points to the chief aids to perseverance, namely, patience and faith—verse 36. Second, he encourages the Lord's people by the prospect of the sure and speedy coming of the Redeemer who would then reward them—verse 37. Third, he warns again of the fearful state of the apostate—verse 38. Fourth, he affirms that they who persevered to the end, believe to the saving of the soul—verse 39. The obvious design of these verses is to stir up Christians unto utmost earnestness in making their calling and election sure, to guard them against the danger of backsliding, and to bear their trials with submission to the will of God. May it please the Holy Spirit to apply this passage in power to the heart of both writer and reader, that our meditation may issue in fruit to the glory of our blessed Lord.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" (verse 35). Let us notice first the force of the

"therefore." This is an inference drawn from the foregoing: since you have already suffered so many things in your persons and goods, and inasmuch as Divine grace supported and carried you through with constancy and joy, do not be discouraged and give way to despair at the approach of similar trials. Further, this "therefore" is drawn from the blissful prospect which the sure promise of God holds before His faithful people, and gives point to the admonition: inasmuch as confidence persisted in is going to be richly repaid, cast it not away.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence." The word "confidence" here has respect unto an attitude or state of heart Godwards. It is the same term (in the Greek) as is translated "boldness" in Hebrews 10:19. It is found again in 1 John 3:21, "then have we confidence toward God"; and verse 14, "this is the confidence that we have in Him." It is not so much faith itself, as one of the products or fruits thereof. It is closer akin to hope. It is that effect of faith which fits the Christian for freedom and readiness unto all his spiritual duties, notwithstanding difficulties and discouragements. It is that frame of spirit which carries us cheerfully through all those sufferings which a real profession of the Gospel entails. More specifically, this "confidence" may be defined as fortitude of mind, courage of heart, and constancy of will.

From what has just been said, it will be seen that we do not agree with those commentators who understand verse 35 as dehorting against the abandonment of Christianity. The apostle's admonition here strikes deeper than a warning against forsaking the outward profession of the Gospel. It is addressed against that state of heart, which, if it became chronic, would likely lead to the external forsaking of Christ. What is needed in the face of trials and persecution is boldness of mind, the heart being freed from bondage and fear, through a prevailing persuasion of our acceptance with God in the performance of those duties which He has appointed us. It was this particular grace which was admired in Peter and John in Acts 4:13. It is only as the mind remains convinced of the righteousness of our cause, and as the heart is assured we are doing that which is well-pleasing to God, that, when we are criticized and condemned by men, and are menaced by their frowns and threats, we shall be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58), in nothing moved by our adversaries.

This confidence in and toward God, which had hitherto sustained the persecuted Hebrews, they are here bidden to "cast not away." Here again the responsibility of the Christian is addressed. There are those who insist we can no more control our "confidence"—weaken or strengthen it—than we can control the wind. But this is to lose sight of the fact that we are moral creatures and accountable for the use or misuse of all our faculties. If I allow my mind to dwell upon the difficulties before me, the disadvantages I may suffer through faithfulness to Christ, or listen to the whisperings of Satan as to how I can avoid trouble by little compromises, then my courage will soon wane, and I shall be to blame. On the other hand, if I seek grace to dwell upon God's promises, realize it is an honor to suffer for Christ's sake, and remind myself that whatever I lose here is not worthy to be compared with what I shall gain hereafter, then, assured that God is for me, I shall care not who be against me.

To encourage the tempted Hebrews the apostle at once added, "which hath great recompense of reward." From these words it is very evident that the true Christian may, and should, have his eye upon the reward that is promised those who suffer for the Gospel's sake. Nor does this verse by any means stand alone: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake: Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven" (Matthew 5:11, 12)—notice carefully the words "in Heaven," which at once exposes the error of those who declare that the "Sermon on the Mount" belongs not to and is not about those who are members of the Body of Christ, but is "Jewish" and "Millennial." Christians are not sufficiently occupied with their reward in Heaven.

The subject of "Rewards" is too large a one for us to now canvass in detail, yet in view of present-day errors something needs to be said thereon. Not a few suppose that the concepts presented by "grace" and "reward" are irreconcilably at variance. The trouble with such people is that, instead of searching the Scriptures to discover how the Holy Spirit has used the term, they turn to a human dictionary. In human affairs a "reward" commonly (though not always) denotes the recognition and recompensing of a meritorious performance; but not so is its general usage in Scripture. Take the first occurrence of the word: in Genesis 15:1 we find Jehovah saying

unto Abraham, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward": how utterly impossible for the patriarch to have done anything to deserve this! Once it is plainly perceived that in Scripture the term "reward" has in it no thought of a meet return for a meritorious performance, much of the fog with which modern "dispensationalists" have surrounded the subject will be cleared away.

"Which hath great recompense of reward." Rightly did John Calvin point out in his comments on this verse: "By mentioning 'reward,' he diminishes nothing from the gratuitous promise of salvation, for the faithful know that their labor is not in vain in the Lord in such a way that they still rest on God's mercy alone. But it has been often stated elsewhere how 'reward' is not incompatible with the gratuitous imputation of righteousness." If those who suppose that Christians living since the days of J.N. Darby and "Dr." Scofield appeared on the scene have "much more light" than they who preceded them, would only read the Reformers and the Puritans with an unprejudiced mind, they would soon be obliged to revise their ideas. In many respects we have gone backwards instead of forwards, and only too often the "light" which is in men, is but darkness, and "how great is that darkness" (Matthew 6:23)!—so great that it closes their eyes against all true light.

"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (verse 36). The opening "for" intimates that the apostle is here confirming the exhortation which he had just insisted upon. "The reward can be obtained only by holding fast this confidence—by adhering steadily and perseveringly to Christ and His cause" (John Brown). Patience, or endurance in the path of obedience, fidelity and suffering, is indispensably necessary if we are to be preserved unto salvation. Let those who will, call this teaching legalistic; the only other alternative is lawlessness and licentiousness. Though it is not "for," yet it is "through faith and patience" or "perseverance," that we "inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12).

No one who is familiar with the writings of John Owen the Puritan, who proclaimed the free grace of God and the gratuitousness of His salvation in such certain terms, will accuse him of legality or of inculcating creature-merits; yet he, in his comments in Hebrews 10:35, 36 wrote, "Wherefore, 'the

recompense of the reward' here intended, is the glory of Heaven, proposed as a crown unto them that overcome in their sufferings for the Gospel. And the future glory, which, as unto its original cause, is the fruit of the good pleasure and sovereign grace of God, whose pleasure it is to give us the kingdom; and as unto its procuring cause is the sole purchase of the blood of Christ, who obtained for us eternal redemption; and it is, on both accounts, a free gift of God, for 'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God through Christ is life eternal' (so as it can be no way merited nor procured by ourselves, by virtue of any proportion by the rules of justice between what we do or suffer, and what is promised), is yet constantly promised to suffering believers, under the name of a recompense or a reward. For it doth not become the great—ness and goodness of God to call His own people unto sufferings for His name, and unto His glory, and therein to the loss of their lives many times, with all enjoyments here below, and not propose unto them, nor provide for them, that which shall be infinitely better than all that they so undergo. This confidence 'hath' this recompense of reward; that is, it gives a right and title unto the future reward of glory: it hath in it the promise and constitution of God; whoever abides in its exercise, shall be no longer in the issue."

"For ye have need of patience." The apostle did not charge them with being destitute of this grace, for all who are born of the Spirit bear, in some measure, the fruit of the Spirit, and this among the rest (Gal. 5:22); those who are brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, are into His patience also (Rev. 1:9). No, the apostle signified that they needed the exercise, continuance, and increase of this grace: compare Zephaniah 2:3 where the "meek" are exhorted to seek "meekness." That unto which the apostle would bestir these saints was, that they receive afflictions as from the hand of God, to bear reproaches and persecutions from men as that unto which He had "appointed" them (1 Thess. 3:3), to commit their cause unto the Lord and rest in Him (Ps. 37:5, 6); to bear up, and not sink under trials, and to live in the constant expectation of Heaven.

The Hebrew Christians (like we sometimes are) were tempted to become weary of well doing. Numbers of their fellows who had once appeared to be zealous believers, had apostatized, and the rest would soon be sorely tried. It was necessary then that they should arm their minds with the spirit of resignation and persevering

constancy, that having done the will of God, by steadfastly cleaving to Christ, and obeying Him through all temptations and sufferings, they might afterwards receive the promised gift of eternal life. The principle of this verse remains unchanged. Satan is the same, and so also is the world, and they who will live godly cannot escape trials and tribulations. Nor is it desirable that we should: some of the finer and more delicate of the Christian graces can only be developed under stress and suffering. Then how much we need to pray for God to sanctify to our good each affliction which comes upon us, so that fruit may issue to His praise and that we may so conduct ourselves as to be encouragements to fellow-pilgrims.

The exercise of this grace of patience is to be continued until "after ye have done the will of God." There is no dismissal from the discharge of this duty while we are left here upon earth. While the more immediate reference is unto meekly bearing whatever the sovereign will of our all-wise and infinitely loving God has ordained for us, yet the active walking in the way of God's commandments is also included, as is evident from the word "done." The will of God, as it is made known in His Word, is the alone rule by which we are to live and all our ways are to be conformed. That revealed will of God is not only to be believed and revered by us, but practiced as well. No situation in which we can be placed, no threatenings of men however terrible, can ever justify us for disobeying God. True, there will be seasons of sore testing, times when it seems that our trials are more than flesh and blood can endure, and then it is that we most have "need of patience"; nor will Divine succor and supernatural grace be withheld if we humbly and trustfully seek it.

"That, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Here the "great recompense of reward" of the previous verse is designated "the promise," partly to guard against the error that eternal life can be earned, or that Heaven can be merited by creature performances; and partly to emphasize the certainty of that which is promised unto all who endure unto the end. The "promise" is here put for the things promised, as in Hebrews 6:12, 17; 11:13, 39. It is called "the promise" as in 1 John 2:25 etc., because it is the grand comprehensive promise, including all others, being the glorious consummation to which they point. Nor should any stumble because they cannot perceive the consistency of a thing being both a "reward" and a "promise." We find the same conjunction of concepts

in Colossians 3:24, "Ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ": it is so denominated to show that it is not merited by works, but is bestowed by free grace, and will certainly be enjoyed by all the elect; and yet, it will only be obtained by them as they persevere in the path of duty.

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (verse 37). The causal "For" denotes that the apostle was about to confirm what he had just said: he both adds a word to strengthen their "confidence" and "patience," and also points them to the near approach of the time when they should receive their "reward." The Greek is very expressive and emphatic. The apostle used a word which signifies "a little while," and then for further emphasis added a particle meaning "very," and this he still further intensified by repeating it; thus, literally rendered this clause reads, "For yet a very, very little while, and He that shall come will come."

"There is indeed nothing that avails more to sustain our minds, should they at any time become faint, than the hope of a speedy and near termination. As a general holds forth to his soldiers the prospect that the war will soon end, provided they hold out a little longer; so the apostle reminds us that the Lord will shortly come to deliver us from all evils, provided our minds faint not through want of firmness. And in order that this consolation might have more assurance and authority, he adduces the testimony of Habakkuk. But as he follows the Greek version, he departs somewhat from the words of the prophet" (John Calvin). Frequently does the Holy Spirit emphasize the exceeding (comparative) brevity of the saints' sufferings in this world; "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5); "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20); "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment" (2 Cor. 4:17).

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." The reference here is to the person of the Lord Jesus, as is evident from Habakkuk 2:3, to which the apostle here alludes. Like so many prophecies, that word of Habakkuk's was to receive a threefold fulfillment: a literal and initial one, a spiritual and continuous one, a final and complete one. The literal was the Divine incarnation, when the Son of God came here in flesh. The final will be His return in visible glory and power. The spiritual has reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when that which most

obstructed the manifestation of Christ's kingdom on earth was destroyed—with the overthrow of the Temple and its worship, official Judaism came to an end. The Christians in Palestine were being constantly persecuted by the Jews, but their conquest by Titus and their consequent dispersion put an end to this. That event was less than ten years distant when Paul wrote: compare our remarks on "see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

We trust that none will conclude from what has been said above that we regard verse 37 as containing no reference to the final coming of Christ. What we have sought to point out was the immediate purport of its contents unto the Hebrews. But it also contains a message for us, a message of hope and comfort. It is our privilege too to be waiting for God's Son from Heaven. Let us add that it is a big mistake to regard every mention of the "coming" of Christ in the N.T. Scriptures as referring to His "appearing the second time" (Heb. 9:28). In John 14:18, 28, the reference was to Christ's "coming" by His Spirit; in John 14:23 to His "coming" in loving manifestation to the individual soul; in Ephesians 2:17 He "came" by the Gospel; in Revelations 2:5 His "coming" is in chastisement. Careful study of each verse is required in order to distinguish between these several aspects.

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (verse 38). The first half of this verse is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, and its pertinency to the admonition which the apostle was pressing upon the Hebrews is not difficult to perceive. The prophet is cited in proof that perseverance is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a child of God. He who has been justified by God, through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to his account, lives by faith as the influencing principle of his life. Thus the apostle declared, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). The one whom God has exonerated from the curse and condemnation of the law, is not him who has merely "believed," but is the man who continues "believing," with all that that word includes, and involves. Let the reader fully note the force of the present perfect "believeth" in John 3:15, 16, 18; 5:24 etc., and contrast the "for a while believed" of Luke 8:13!

The use of the future tense "shall live" announces and enforces the necessity for the continued exercise of faith. It is true

that one who has been justified by God was previously quickened, for we are "justified by faith" (Acts 13:39, Romans 5:1 etc.), and one who is dead in trespasses and sins cannot savingly believe—note the "called" before "justified" in Romans 8:30. It is also true that the real Christian lives by faith, for that is the very nature of indwelling grace. But it is equally true that the "just shall live by faith." The constant exercise of faith by the saint is as essential to his final salvation as it was to his initial salvation. Just as the soul can only be delivered from the wrath to come by repentance (self-judgment) and personal faith in the Lord Jesus, so we can only be delivered from the power of indwelling sin, from the temptations of Satan, from an enticing world which seeks to destroy us, by a steady and persistent walking by faith.

Patient endurance is a fruit of faith, yet it is only as that vital and root grace is in daily exercise, that the Christian is enabled to stand firm amid the storms of life. Those whom God declares righteous in Christ are to pass their lives here, not in doubt and fear, but in the maintenance of a calm trust in and a joyful obedience to Him. Only as the heart is engaged with God and feeds upon His Word, will the soul be invigorated and fitted to press onwards when everything outward seems to be against him. It is by our faith being drawn out unto things above that we receive the needed strength which causes us to look away from the discouraging and distracting scene around us. As faith lives upon Christ (John 6:56, 57), it draws virtue from Him, as the branch derives sap from the root of the vine. Faith makes us resign ourselves and our affairs to Christ's disposing, cheerfully treading the path of duty and patiently waiting that issue which He will give. Faith is assured that our Head knows far better than we do what is good and best.

"But if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." It seems to the writer that the translators of the A.V. took an unwarranted liberty with the Word of God when they inserted (in italics) the words "any man" and changed "and" (kai) into "but": the Holy Scripture should never be altered to suit our ideas of evangelical truth—the R.V. correctly gives "if he shrink back," and Bag. Int. "and if he draw back." Yes, if the "just" man himself were to draw back and continue in apostasy, he would finally perish. "By this solemn consideration, therefore, the apostle urges on them the importance of perseverance, and the guilt and danger of apostasy

from the Christian faith. If such a case should occur, no matter what might have been the former condition, and no matter what love or zeal might have been evinced, yet such an apostasy would expose the individual to the certain wrath of God. His former love could not save him, any more than the former obedience of the angels saved them from the horrors of eternal chains and darkness" (A. Barnes).

"And if he drew back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." Once more the apostle faithfully warns the Hebrew Christians (and us) of the dreadful consequence which would attend the continuance in a course of backsliding. He who thinks that by refusing to take up his cross daily and follow the example left by Christ, can escape the world's reproach and persecution and yet go to Heaven, is fatally deluding himself. Said the Lord Jesus, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it" (Matthew 16:25): that is, he who is so diligent in looking after his temporal prospects, worldly reputation and personal comforts, shall eternally lose his soul.

It was to stir up the Hebrews unto the more diligent laboring after living the life of faith that the apostle here pointed out the terrible alternative: unless they maintained a steady trust in God and an obedient submission unto His revealed will, they were in grave danger of backsliding and apostatizing. If any should "draw back" then God would have "no pleasure in him," which is but the negative way of saying that he would be an object of abhorrence. But observe closely, it does not say God would have "no more pleasure in him," which would conflict with the uniform teaching of the Word concerning the unchanging love of God (Mal. 3:6, John 13:1, Romans 8:35-39) toward His own. O the minute accuracy of Holy Writ! The practical application of this solemn word to us is, that in order to have a scripturally-grounded assurance of God's taking pleasure in us, we must continue cleaving closely unto Him.

"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (verse 39). The word "perdition" shows plainly that the "drawing back" of the previous verse is a fatal and final one. Nevertheless, so far is verse 38 from establishing the doom of any child of God, the apostle assures the Hebrews that no such fate would overtake them. What is added here in this verse, was to prevent their being unduly affrighted with the solemn warnings previously given, and lest they should conclude that Paul thought evilly of them: though he had warned, he did not

regard them as treading the broad road to destruction, instead he was "persuaded better things of them" (Heb. 6:9). "Let it be noticed that this truth belongs also to us, for we, whom God has favored with the light of the Gospel, ought to acknowledge that we have been called in order that we may advance more and more in our obedience to God, and strive constantly to draw nearer to Him. This is the real preservation of the soul, for by so doing we shall escape eternal perdition" (John Calvin).

"In this the apostle expresses the fullest conviction that none of those to whom he wrote would apostatize. The case which he had been describing was only a supposable case, not one which he believed would occur. He had only been stating what must happen if a sincere Christian should apostatize. But he did not mean to say that this would occur in regard to them. He made a statement of a general principle under the Divine administration, and he designed that this should be a means of keeping them in the path of life" (A. Barnes). Christians may grow cold, neglect the means of grace, backslide, fall into grievous sins as did David and Peter; but they shall not "draw back unto perdition." No, they have been predestinated "to be conformed unto" the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), and God's purpose cannot fail. They are the objects of Christ's intercession (John 17:15, 24), and that is efficacious (John 11:42). They are restored by the good Shepherd when they go astray (Ps. 23:3).

As the term "perdition" denoted that eternal damnation is the doom of apostates, so the word "salvation" here has reference to that ultimate consummation of the portion of all true believers. It is to be carefully noted that the apostle did not say, "them that have believed to the salvation of the soul," but "them that believe to the saving of the soul." The difference is real and radical. There is a blessed sense in which every regenerated believer has been saved by Christ, yet there is also another and most important sense in which his salvation is yet future: see Romans 13:11, 1 Peter 1:5, 9. The complete and final salvation of the Christian is dependent upon his continued trust in and obedience to God in Christ, not as the cause thereof, yet as the indispensable means thereto.

It is gloriously true that Christians are "kept by the power of God." He who prepares Heaven for them preserves them unto it. But by what instrument or means? The same verse tells us: "through

faith" (1 Pet. 1:5). To depend upon an invisible God for a happiness that awaits us in an invisible world, when in the meantime He permits us to be harassed with all sorts of temptations, trials and troubles, requires faith—real faith, supernatural faith. Through faith alone can the heart be sustained till we obtain salvation. Nothing but a God-given and God-maintained faith can enable us to row against the stream of flesh and blood, and so deny its cravings that we shall win through to Heaven at last. The "flesh" is for sparing and pampering the body; but "faith" is for the "saving of the soul."

Hebrews 11:1-3

Chapter 56 - The Excellency of Faith

Ere we take up the contents of the 11th chapter let us briefly review the sound already covered. Chapters 1 and 2 are more or less introductory in their character. In them the wondrous person of the God-man Mediator is presented to our view, as superior to the O.T. prophets and as excelling the angels. The first main division of the Epistle commences at Hebrews 3:1 and runs to the end of Hebrews 4:15, and treats of the mission of Christ: this is seen to surpass that of either Moses or Joshua, for neither of them led the people into the real rest of God; the section is followed by a practical application in Hebrews 4:16. The second principal division begins with Hebrews 5:1 and extends to Hebrews 10:18, and deals with the priesthood of Christ: this is shown to transcend the Aaronic in dignity, efficacy and permanency; the section is followed by a practical application, contained in Hebrews 10:19 to Hebrews 12:29. The closing chapter forms a conclusion to the Epistle.

"The general nature of this Epistle, as unto the kind of writing, is paranetical or hortatory, which is taken from its end and design. The exhortation proposed is to constancy and perseverance in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the profession of the Gospel, against temptations and persecutions. Both these the Hebrews had to conflict with in their profession; the one from the Judaical church-state itself, the other from the members of it. Their temptations to draw back and forsake their profession, arose from the consideration of the Judaical church-state and Mosaic ordinances of worship, which they were called by the Gospel to relinquish. The Divine institution of that state, with its worship, the solemnity of the covenant whereon it was established, the glory of its priesthood, sacrifices and other Divine ordinances (Rom. 9:4), with their efficacy for acceptance with God, were continually proposed unto them, and pressed on them, to allure and draw them off from the Gospel. And the trial was very great, after the inconsistency of the two states was made manifest. This gave occasion to the whole

doctrinal part of the Epistle, the exposition of which, by Divine grace and assistance, we have passed through. For therein declaring the nature, use, end, and signification of all Divine institutions under the O.T.; and allowing unto them all the glory and efficacy which they could pretend unto, the writer of this Epistle declares from the Scripture itself that the state of the Gospel church, in its high-priest, sacrifice, covenant, worship, privileges and efficacy, is incomparably to be preferred above that of the O.T.; yea, that all the excellency and glory of that state, and all that belonged unto it, consisted only in the representation that was made thereby, of the greater glory of Christ and the Gospel, without which they were of no use, and therefore ruinous or pernicious to be persisted in.

"After he had fixed their minds in the truth, and armed them against the temptations which they were continually exposed to; the apostle proceeds to the second means, whereby their steadiness and constancy in the profession of the Gospel, which he exhorted them unto, was already assaulted, and was yet like to be assaulted with greater force and fury. This arose from the opposition which befell them, and from the persecutions of all sorts that they had endured, and were still like to undergo, for their faith in Christ Jesus with the profession thereof, and observance of the holy worship ordained in the Gospel. This they suffered from the obstinate members of the Jewish church, as they did the other (temptation) from the state of that church itself. An account hereof the apostle enters upon in the close of the foregoing chapter; and withal declares unto them the only way and means on their part, whereby they may be preserved, and kept constant in their profession notwithstanding all the evils that might befall them therein, and this is by faith alone. From their temptations they were delivered by the doctrine of the truth, and from the opposition made unto them, by faith in exercise" (John Owen).

The particular character of the section begun at Hebrews 10:19 is not difficult to ascertain: it is addressed to our responsibility. This is at once evident in the "Let us" of Hebrews 10:22, 23, 24. In Hebrews 10:32-36 there is a call to patient waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises. Nothing but real faith in the veracity of the Promiser can sustain the heart and prompt to steady endurance during a protracted season of trial and suffering. Hence in Hebrews 10:38 the apostle quotes that striking word from

Habakkuk, "The just shall live by faith." That sentence really forms the text of which Hebrews 11 is the sermon. The central design of this chapter is to evidence the patience of those who, in former ages, endured by faith before they received the fulfillment of God's promises: note particularly verses 13, 39.

"Whoever made this (verse 1) the beginning of the eleventh chapter, has unwisely disjointed the context; for the object of the apostle was to prove what he had already said—that there is need of patience. He had quoted the testimony of Habakkuk, who says that the just lives by faith; he now shows what remained to be proved—that faith can be no more separated from patience than from itself. The order then of what he says is this: 'We shall not reach the goal of salvation except we have patience, for the prophet declares that the just lives by faith; but faith directs us to things afar off which we do not as yet enjoy; it then necessarily includes patience.' Therefore the minor proposition in the argument is this, 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for'" (John Calvin).

"The apostle now, for the illustration and enforcement of his exhortation, brings forward a great variety of instances, from the history of former ages, in which faith had enabled individuals to perform very difficult duties, endure very severe trials, and obtain very important blessings. The principles of the apostle's exhortation are plainly these: 'They who turn back, turn back unto perdition. It is only they who persevere in believing that obtain the salvation of the soul. Nothing but a persevering faith can enable a person, through a constant continuance in well-doing, and a patient, humble submission to the will of God, to obtain that glory, honor, and immortality which the Gospel promises. Nothing but a persevering faith can do this; and a persevering faith can do it, as is plain from what it has done in former ages'" (John Brown).

The order of thought followed by the apostle in Hebrews 11 was ably and helpfully set forth by an early Puritan: "The parts of this whole chapter are two: 1. a general description of faith: verses 1 to 4. 2. An illustration or declaration of that description, by a large rehearsal of manifold examples of ancient and worthy men in the Old Testament: verses 4 to 40. The description of faith consists of three actions or effects of faith, set down in three several verses. The first effect is that faith makes things which are not (but only are hoped for), after a sort, to subsist and to be present with the believer:

verse 1. The second effect is that faith makes a believer approved of God: verse 2. The third effect is that faith makes a man understand and believe things incredible to sense and reason" (Win. Perkins, 1595).

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (verse 1). The opening "Now" has almost the force of "for," denoting a farther confirmation of what had just been declared. At the close of chapter 10 the apostle had just affirmed that the saving of the soul is obtained through believing, whereupon he now takes occasion to show what faith is and does. That faith can, and does, preserve the soul, prompting to steadfastness under all sorts of trials and issuing in salvation, may not only be argued from the effects which is its very nature to produce, but is illustrated and demonstrated by one example after another, cited in the verses which follow. It is important to bear in mind at the outset that Hebrews 11 is an amplification and exemplification of Hebrews 10:38, 39: the "faith" which the apostle is describing and illustrating is that which has the saving of the soul annexed to it.

"In verse 1 there is the thing described, and the description itself. The thing described is Faith; the description is this: 'It is the substance of things hoped for' etc. The description is proper, according to the rules of art: habits (or graces) are described by their formal acts, and acts restrained to their proper objects; so faith is here described by its primary and formal acts, which are referred to their distinct objects. The acts of faith are two: it is the substance, it is the evidence. Think it not strange that I call them acts, for that is it the apostle intends; therefore Beza says, in rendering this place, he had rather paraphrase the text than obscure the scope, and he interpreteth it thus—Faith substantiates or gives a subsistence to our hopes, and demonstrates things not seen. There is a great deal of difference between the acts of faith and the effects of faith. The effects of faith are reckoned up throughout this chapter; the formal acts of faith are in this verse. These acts are suited with their objects. As the matters of belief are yet to come, faith gives them a substance, a being, as they are hidden from the eyes of sense and carnal reason; faith also gives them an evidence, and doth convince men of the worth of them; so that one of these acts belongs to the understanding, the other to the will" (Thos. Manton, 1670).

The contents of verse 1 do not furnish so much a formal

definition of faith, as they supply a terse description of how it operates and what it produces. Faith, whether natural or spiritual, is the belief of a testimony. Here, faith is believing the testimony of God. How it operates in reference to the subjects of this testimony, whether they be considered simply as future, or as both invisible and future, and the effects produced in and on the soul, the Holy Spirit here explains. First, He tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for." The Greek word rendered "substance" has been variously translated. The margin of the A.V. gives "ground or confidence." The R.V. has "assurance" in the text, and "giving substance to" in the margin. The Greek word is "hypostasis" and is rendered "confident" (should be "this confidence of boasting," as in Bag. Int.) in both 2 Corinthians 9:4 and 11:17; "person" (should be "subsistence" or "essential being") in Hebrews 1:3; and "confidence" in Hebrews 3:14. Personally, the writer believes it has a double force, so will seek to expound it accordingly.

"Faith is the confidence of things hoped for." In this chapter (and in general throughout the N.T.) "faith" is far more than a bare assent to any thing revealed and declared by God: it is a firm persuasion of that which is hoped for, because it assures its possessor not only that there are such things, but that through the power and faithfulness of God he shall yet possess them. Thus it becomes the ground of expectation. The Word of God is the objective foundation on which my hopes rest, but faith provides a subjective foundation, for it convinces me of the certainty of them. Faith and confidence are inseparable: just so far as I am counting upon the ability and fidelity of the Promiser, shall I be confident of receiving the things promised and which I am expecting. "We believe and are sure" (John 6:69).

From what has just been said, the reader will perhaps perceive better the force of the rather peculiar word "substance" in the text of the A.V. It comes from two Latin words, *sub stans* meaning "standing under." Faith provides a firm standing-ground while I await the fulfillment of God's promises. Faith furnishes my heart with a sure support during the interval. Faith believes God and relies upon His veracity: as it does so, the heart is anchored and remains steady, no matter how fierce the storm nor how protracted the season of waiting. "These all died in faith, not having received the (fulfillment of the) promises; but having seen them afar off, and

were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (Heb. 11:13). Real faith issues in a confident and standing expectation of future things.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for": as the marginal reading of the R.V. suggests, "giving substance to." Crediting the sure testimony of God, resting on His promises, and expecting the accomplishment of them, faith gives the object hoped for at a future period, a present reality and power in the soul, as if already possessed; for the believer is satisfied with the security afforded, and acts under the full persuasion that God will not fail of His engagement. Faith gives the soul an appropriating hold of them. "Faith is a firm persuasion and expectation that God will perform all that He has promised to us in Christ; and this persuasion is so strong that it gives the soul a kind of possession and present fruition of those things, gives them a subsistence in the soul by the firstfruits and foretastes of them; so that believers in the exercise of faith are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (Matthew Henry).

The confident expectation which faith inspires, gives the objects of the Christian's hope a present and actual being in his heart. Faith does not look out with cold thoughts about things to come, but imparts life and reality to them. Faith does for us spiritually what fancy does for us naturally. There is a faculty of the understanding which enables us to picture to the mind's eye things which are yet future. But faith does more: it gives not an imaginary appearance to things, but a real subsistence. Faith is a grace which unites subject and object: there is no need to ascend to Heaven, for faith makes distant things nigh (see Romans 10:6, 7). Faith, then, is the bond of union between the soul and the things God has promised. By believing we "receive"; by believing in Christ, He becomes ours (John 1:12). Therefore does faith enable the Christian to praise the Lord for future blessings as though he were already in the full possession of them.

But how does faith bring to the heart a present subsistence of future things? First, by drawing from the promises that which, by Divine institution, is stored up in them: hence they are called the "breasts of consolation" (Isa. 66:11). Second, by making the promises the food of the soul (Jer. 15:16), which cannot be unless they are really present unto it. Third, by conveying an experience of their power, as unto all the ends of which they are purposed: it is as Divine truth is appropriated and assimilated that it becomes

powerfully operative in the soul. Fourth, by communicating unto us the firstfruits of the promises: faith gives a living reality to what it absorbs, and so real and potent is the impression made, that the heart is changed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18).

Ere passing on, let us pause for a word of application. Many profess to "believe," but what influence have their hopes upon them? How are they affected by the things which their faith claims to have laid hold of? I profess to believe that sin is a most heinous thing—do I fear, hate, shun it? I believe that ere long I shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ—does my conduct evince that I am living in the light of that solemn day? I believe that the world is an empty bauble—do I despise its painted tinsel? I believe that God will supply all my need—am I fearful about the morrow? I believe that prayer is an essential means unto growth in grace—do I spend much time in the secret place? I believe that Christ is coming back again—am I diligent in seeking to have my lamp trimmed and burning? Faith is evident by its fruits, works, effects.

Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." The Greek noun here rendered "evidence" ("proving" in the R.V., with "test" in the margin) is derived from a verb which signifies to convince, and that by demonstration. It was used by the Lord Jesus when He uttered that challenge, "which of you convicteth Me of sin?" (John 8:46). The noun occurs in only one other place, namely, 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is... profitable for doctrine, for reproof," or "conviction"—to give assurance and certainty of what is true. Thus, the word "evidence" in our text denotes that which furnishes proof, so that one is assured of the reality and certainty of things Divine. "Faith," then, is first the hand of the soul which "lays hold of" the contents of God's promises; second, it is the eye of the soul which looks out toward and represents them clearly and convincingly to us.

To unbelievers the invisible, spiritual, and future things revealed in God's Word seem dubious and unreal, for they have no medium to perceive them: "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). But the child of God sees "Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Perhaps we might illustrate it thus: two men stand on the deck of a ship gazing toward the far horizon; the one sees nothing, the other describes the details of a distant steamer. The former has only his

unaided eyesight, the latter is using a telescope! Now just as a powerful glass brings home to the eye an object beyond the range of natural vision, so faith gives reality to the heart of things outside the range of our physical senses. Faith sets Divine things before the soul in all the light and power of demonstration, and thus provides inward conviction of their existence. "Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind the reality of those things which cannot be discerned by the eye of the body" (Matthew Henry).

The natural man prefers a life of sense, and to believe nothing more than that which is capable of scientific demonstration. When eternal things, yet invisible, are pressed upon him, he is full of objections against them. Those are the objections of unbelief, stirred into activity by the "fiery darts" of Satan, and naught but the shield of faith can quench them. But when the Holy Spirit renews the heart, the prevailing power of unbelief is broken; faith argues "God has said it, so it must be true." Faith so convinces the understanding that it is compelled, by force of arguments unanswerable, to believe the certainty of all God has spoken. The conviction is so powerful that the heart is influenced thereby, and the will moved to conform thereto. This it is which causes the Christian to forsake the "pleasures of sin" which are only "for a season" (Heb. 11:25), because by faith he has laid hold of those satisfying "pleasures at God's right hand" which are "for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

To sum up the contents of verse 1. To unbelief, the objects which God sets before us in His Word seem unreal and unlikely, nebulous and vague. But faith visualizes the unseen, giving substantiality to the things hoped for and reality to things invisible. Faith shuts its eyes to all that is seen, and opens its ears to all God has said. Faith is a convictive power which overcomes carnal reasonings, carnal prejudices, and carnal excuses. It enlightens the judgment, moulds the heart, moves the will, and reforms the life. It takes us off earthly things and worldly vanities, and occupies us with spiritual and Divine realities. It emboldens against discouragements, laughs at difficulties, resists the Devil, and triumphs over temptations. It does so because it unites the soul to God and draws strength from Him. Thus faith is altogether a supernatural thing.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report" (verse 2). Having described the principal qualities of faith, the apostle now

proceeds to give further proof of its excellency, as is evident from the opening "For." It is by faith we are approved of God. By the "elders" is signified those who lived in former times, namely, the O.T. saints—included among the "fathers" or Hebrews 1:1. It was not by their amiability, sincerity, earnestness, or any other natural virtue, but by faith that the ancients "obtained a good report." This declaration was made by the apostle with the purpose of reminding the Hebrews that their pious progenitors were justified by faith, and to the end of the chapter he shows that faith was the principle of all their holy obedience, eminent services, and patient sufferings in the cause of God. Therefore those who were spiritually united to them must have something more than physical descent from them.

"For by it the elders obtained a good report." Observe the beautiful accuracy of Scripture: it was not for their faith (nor could it be without it!), but "by" their faith: it was not a cause, yet it was a condition; there was nothing meritorious in it, yet it was a necessary means. Let us also observe that faith is no new thing, but a grace planted in the hearts of God's elect from the beginning. Then, as now, faith was the substance of things hoped for—promises to be accomplished in the future. The faith of Abel laid hold of Christ as truly as does ours. God has had but one way of salvation since sin entered the world: "by grace, through faith, not of works." They are grossly mistaken who suppose that under the old covenant people were saved by keeping the law. The "fathers" had the same promises we have: not merely of Canaan, but of heaven—see Hebrews 11:16.

The Greek for "obtained a good report" is not in the active voice, but the passive: literally, "were witnessed of," an honorable testimony being borne to them—cf., verses 4, 5. God took care that a record should be kept (complete in Heaven, in part transcribed in the Scriptures) of all the actings of their faith. God has borne witness to the fact that Enoch "walked with Him" (Gen. 5:24), that David was "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), that Abraham was His "friend" (2 Chron. 20:7). This testimony of His acceptance of them because of their faith was borne by God. Not only externally in His Word, but in their consciences. He gave them His Spirit who assured them of their acceptance: Psalm 51:12, Acts 15:8. Let writer and reader learn to esteem what God does: let us value a Christian not for his intellect, natural charms, or social position, but for his faith, evidenced by an obedient walk and godly life.

We cannot do better in closing our comments upon verse 2 than by giving the "practical observations" on it of John Owen: "1. Instances or examples are the most powerful confirmations of practical truths. 2. They who have a good testimony from God shall never want reproaches from the world. 3. It is faith alone, which, from the beginning of the world (or from the giving of the first promise), was the means and way of obtaining acceptance with God. 4. The faith of true believers, from the beginning of the world, was fixed on things future, hoped for, invisible. 5. That faith whereby men please God acts itself in a fixed contemplation on things future and invisible, from whence it derived an encouragement and strength to endure and abide firm in profession, against all opposition and persecutions. 6. Men may be despised, vilified, and reproached in the world, yet if they have faith, if they are true believers, they are accepted with God, and He will give them a good report."

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (verse 3). There is a much closer connection between this verse and the two preceding ones than most of the commentators have perceived. The apostle is still setting forth the importance and excellency of faith: here he affirms that, through it its favored possessors are enabled to apprehend things which are high above the reach of human reason. The origin of the universe presents a problem which neither science nor philosophy can solve, as is evident from their conflicting and ridiculous attempts; but that difficulty vanishes entirely before faith.

"Through faith we understand." Faith is the vehicle or medium of spiritual perception: "if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God" (John 11:40); "which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3). Faith is not a blind reliance on the Word of God, but an intelligent persuasion of its veracity, wisdom, beauty. So far from Christians being the credulous fools the world deems them, they are the wisest of earth's inhabitants. The "fools" are they who are "slow of heart to believe" (Luke 24:25). Through faith in what has been revealed in the Scriptures we know that the universe is created and fashioned by God. "What does faith give us to understand concerning the worlds, that is, the upper, middle,

lower regions of the universe? 1. That they were not eternal, nor did they produce themselves, but they were made by another. 2. That the Maker of the world is God; He is the Maker of all things; and whosoever is so must be God. 3. That He made the world with great exactness; it was a framed work, in every thing duly adapted and disposed to answer its end, and to express the perfections of the Creator. 4. That God made the world by His word; that is, by His essential wisdom and eternal Son, and by His active will, saying, Let it be done, and it was done. 5. That the world was thus framed out of nothing, out of no pre-existent matter, contrary to the received maxim, that out of nothing nothing can be made, which, though true of created power, can have no place with God, who can call things that are not as if they were, and command them into being. These things we understand by faith" (Matthew Henry).

"That the worlds were framed by the word of God." The word for "worlds" in the Greek signifies "ages," but by a metonymy it is here used of the universe. "The celestial world, with its inhabitants, the angels; the starry and ethereal worlds, with all that is in them, the sun, moon, stars, and fowls of the air; the terrestrial world, with all upon it, man, beasts etc.; and the watery world, the sea, and all that is therein" (John Gill). These "worlds were made at the beginning of mundane time and have continued throughout all ages. "The apostle accommodated his expression to the received opinion of the Jews, and their way of expressing themselves about the world. 'Olam' denotes the world as to the subsistence of it, and as to its duration" (John Owen). We do not, then, espouse Bullinger's strange view of this verse.

The "worlds," or universe, were "framed," that is, were adjusted and disposed into a wise and beautiful order, by "the word of God." That expression is used in a threefold sense. First, there is the essential and personal Word, the eternal Son of God (John 1:1). Second, there is the written, ever-living Word, the Holy Scriptures (John 10:35). Third, there is the Word of Power or manifestation of the invincible will of God. It is the last-mentioned that is in view in Hebrews 11:3. The Greek for "word" is not "logos" (as in John 1:1), but "rhema" (as in Hebrews 1:3); "rhema" signifies a word spoken. The reference is to God's imperial fiat. His effectual command, as throughout Genesis 1: "God said (the manifestation of His invincible will) let light be, and light was." "For He spake, and it was done; He

commanded and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9). An illustration of the Word of His Power (see Hebrews 1:3) is found in John 5:28, 29.

"So that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear." There is some difficulty (in the Greek) in ascertaining the precise meaning of this phrase. Personally, we are inclined to regard it as referring back to Genesis 1:2. The verse before us concerns more directly the fashioning of the present heavens and earth, though that necessarily presupposes their original creation. The elements were submerged and darkness enshrouded them. The practical force of this verse to us is: our "faith" does not rest upon what "appears" outwardly, but is satisfied with the bare Word of God. Since God created the universe out of nothing, how easily can He preserve and sustain us when there is not anything (to our view) in sight! He who can call worlds into existence by the Word of His Power, can command supplies for the neediest of His creatures.

Hebrews 11:4

Chapter 57 - The Faith of Abel

The 11th chapter of Hebrews has three divisions. The first, which comprises verses 1 to 3, is introductory, setting forth the excellency of faith. The second, which is covered by verses 4 to 7, outlines the life of faith. The third, which begins at verse 8 and runs to the end of the chapter, fills in that outline, and, as well, describes the achievements of faith. The first division we went over in our last article. There we saw the excellency of faith proved by four facts. Faith gives a reality and substantiality unto those things which the Word of God warrants us to hope for (verse 1). Faith furnishes proof to the heart of those spiritual things which cannot be discovered by our natural senses (verse 1). Faith secured to the O.T. saints a good report (verse 2). Faith enables its favored possessor to understand that which is incomprehensible to mere reason, imparting a knowledge to which philosophers and scientists are strangers (verse 3). Thus, the tremendous importance and inestimable value of faith is at once apparent.

The second division of our chapter may be outlined thus. First, the beginning of the life of faith (verse 4). Second, the character of the life of faith, showing of what it consists (verse 5). Third, a warning and an encouragement is given (verse 6). Fourth, the end of the life of faith, or the goal to which it conducts (verse 7). That which the Holy Spirit now sets before us, is far more than a list of O.T. worthies, or a miniature picture-gallery of the saints of bygone days. To those whom God grants a receptive heart and anointed eye, there is here deep and important doctrinal instruction, as well as most blessed practical teaching. The contents of Hebrews 11 concern our eternal peace, and it behooves us to give them our most prayerful and diligent attention. May it please the Spirit of Truth to act as our Guide, as we seek to pass from verse to verse.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (verse

4). Rightly understood, this verse describes the beginning of the life of faith. Let us seek to weigh attentively each separate expression in it.

First, it was "by faith" that Abel offered unto God his sacrifice. He is the first man, according to the sacred record, who ever did so. He had no established precedent to follow, no example to emulate, no outward encouragement to stimulate. Thus, his conduct was not suggested by popular custom, nor was his action regulated by "common sense." Neither carnal reason nor personal inclinations could have moved Abel to present a bleeding lamb for God's acceptance. How, then, is his strange procedure to be accounted for? Our text answers: it was "by faith" he acted, and not by fancy or by feelings. But what is signified by this expression? Ah, the mere words "by faith" are far more familiar unto many, than their real import is understood. Vague and visionary indeed are the conceptions which multitudes now entertain thereon. We must not, then, take anything for granted; but rather proceed slowly, and seek to make quite sure of our ground.

The one scripture which, perhaps, more than any other unlocks for us the meaning of the "by faith" which is found so frequently in Hebrews 11 is Romans 10:17. There we read, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Faith must have a foundation to rest upon, and that foundation must be the Word of Him that cannot lie. God speaks, and the heart receives and acts upon what He says. True, there are two kinds of "hearing," just as there are two kinds of "faith." There is an outward "hearing," and there is an inward "hearing": the one merely informs, the other influences; the one simply instructs the mind, the other moulds the heart and moves the will. So there is a twofold meaning to the term "The Word of God" (see our remarks on Hebrews 11:3), namely, the Word as written, and the Word as operative, when God speaks in living power to the soul. Hence, there is a twofold "faith": the one which is merely an intellectual assenting to what God has revealed, and that which is a vital and supernatural principle of action, which "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6).

Now we need hardly say that it is the second of these which is in view here in Hebrews 11:4, and throughout the chapter. But let us move carefully, step by step. It was "by faith" that Abel offered unto God his acceptable sacrifice, and as Romans 10:17 declares,

"faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." It therefore follows that God had definitely revealed His will, that Abel believed that revelation, and that he acted accordingly. Now in O.T. times, God spake to men sometimes directly, sometimes through others. In this instance, we believe the reference is to what God had said to Adam and Eve, and which they had communicated to Cain and Abel. By turning back to Genesis 3 we discover what the Lord said to their parents.

"Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:16-19). But further: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (verse 21). Here the Lord spoke to Adam and Eve by action: four things were clearly intimated. First, that in order for a sinner to stand before the thrice holy God, he needed a covering. Second, that that which was of human manufacture (Heb. 3:7), was worthless. Third, that God Himself must provide the requisite covering. Fourth, that the necessary covering could only be obtained by death, by blood-shedding.

In Genesis 3:15 and 21 we have the first Gospel-sermon which was ever preached on this earth, and that, by the Lord Himself. Life must come out of death. Cain and Abel, and the whole human race, sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19), and the wages of sin is death, penal death. Either I must be paid those wages and suffer that death, or another—an innocent one, on whom death has no claim—must be paid those wages in my stead. And in order to my receiving the benefit of that substitute's compassion, there must be a link of contact between me and him. Faith it is which unites to Christ. Saving faith, then, in its simplest form, is the placing of a Substitute between my guilty self and a sin-hating God.

Now what we have just gone over above, was made known

(probably through Adam) to Cain and Abel. How do we know this? Because, as we have seen, Abel brought his offerings to God "by faith," and Romans 10:17 makes it clear that "faith" presupposes a Divine revelation. Further confirmation of this is found in Genesis 4:7: when Cain's countenance fell at the rejection of his offering, the Lord said unto him, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Thus a Divine institution of sacrifice, clearly defined and made known, is here plainly implied. It was as though God had said to Cain, "Did I promise to accept any other offering than which conformed to My prescription?"

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Three things here claim our attention: the spring of Abel's action (faith), the nature of his offering, wherein it was more excellent than Cain's. The first of these we have already considered, the second we will now examine. The language of our present verse refers us back to Genesis 4; there we read, "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (verse 4). His action here ("brought") is in sharp contrast from his parents in Genesis 3:8, who "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God." The contrast is most significant: a consciousness of guilt caused Adam and Eve to flee; a sense of need moved Abel to seek the Lord. The difference between them is to be attributed unto the respective workings of conscience and faith. An uneasy conscience never of itself, leads to Christ —

"And they which heard, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one... and Jesus was left alone" (John 8:9). "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Gen. 4:4). The separate mention of the "fat" tells us that the lamb had been slain. By killing the lamb and offering it to God, Abel acknowledged at least five things. First, he owned that God was righteous in driving fallen man out of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Second, he owned that he was a guilty sinner, and that death was his just due. Third, he owned that God was holy, and must punish sin. Fourth, he owned that God was merciful, and willing to accept the death of an innocent substitute in his place. Fifth, he owned that he looked for acceptance with God in Christ the Lamb. Therefore did he, by faith, place the blood of his firstlings of his flock (type of Him who is "the Firstborn" or Head "of every creature"—Colossians

1:15) between his sins and the avenging justice of God.

Here, then, is where the life of faith begins. There must first be a bowing unto the righteous verdict of the Divine Judge that I am a sinner, a transgressor, of His holy law, and therefore justly under its "curse" or death-sentence. No excuses have I to offer, no merits have I to plead, no mitigation of the sentence can I fairly ask for. My best performances are only filthy rags in the sight of Him who knows that they were wrought out of self-love and to promote self's interests, rather than for His glory. I can but plead guilty, and hide my face for very shame. But as the Gospel of His grace is applied to my stricken conscience by the power of the Spirit, hope revives. As He makes known to me the amazing fact that the Lamb of God died so that all who bow to God's verdict, own themselves as lost, and hate themselves for their sins, might live; and then faith stretches forth a trembling hand and lays hold of the Redeemer, and the criminal is pardoned, and accepted by God.

Having pondered the character of Abel's sacrifice, let us now consider wherein it was "more excellent" than Cain's. In Genesis 4:3 we read, "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord." Cain was no infidel, for he owned the existence of God; nor was he irreligious, for he came before Him as a worshipper; but he refused to conform to the Divine appointment. By carefully noting the nature of his offering, we may observe four things. First, it was a bloodless one, and "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Second, it was merely the fruit of his toils, the product of his labors. Third, he deliberately ignored the sentence of God in Genesis 3:17: "Cursed is the ground." Fourth, he despised the grace made known in Genesis 3:21.

Thus, in Cain we behold the first hypocrite. He refused to comply with the revealed will of God, yet cloaked his rebellion by coming before Him as a worshipper. He would not obey the Divine appointment, yet brought an offering to the Lord. He believed not that his case was so desperate that death was his due, and could only be escaped by another suffering it in his stead; yet he sought to approach unto the Lord, and patronize Him. This is the "way of Cain" spoken of by Jude (verse 11). It is the way of self-will, of unbelief, of disobedience, and of religious hypocrisy. What a contrast from Abel! Thus we see how there was a striking foreshadowment from the beginning of human history that the

church on earth is a mixed assembly, made up of wheat and tares.

Cain and Abel stand before us as two representative men. They head the two, and the only two classes, which are to be found in the religious world. They typified, respectively, the two sections of Christendom. Cain, the elder, who is mentioned first in Genesis 4 and therefore represents the prominent section, sets forth that vast company who honor God with their lips, but whose hearts are far from Him; who think to pay God a compliment, but who refuse to meet His requirements; who pose as worshippers, but live to please themselves. Abel, on the other hand, hated by Cain, foreshadowed that "little flock," the members of which are brought to feel their sinner-hood, bow to God's will, comply with His commandments, fly to Christ for refuge, and are accepted by God.

Most solemnly too do Cain and Abel furnish us with a striking example of the sovereignty of Divine grace. Both of them were "shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin," for both were the fallen sons of fallen parents, and both of them were born outside of Eden; yet one was "of that Wicked one" (1 John 3:12), while the other was one of God's elect. Marvelously and most blessedly may we here behold the fact that sovereign grace is "no respecter of persons," but passes by (to human ideas) the most likely, and pitches upon the unlikely. Being the younger of the two, Abel was inferior in dignity; God Himself said to Cain, "Thou shalt rule over him" (Gen. 4:7). But spiritual blessings do not follow the order of external privileges: Shem is preferred before Japheth (Gen. 5:32, 10:2, 21); Isaac before Ishmael, Jacob before Esau.

"By (a Divinely-given and Divinely-wrought) faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." The superiority of Abel's worship may, perhaps, be set forth thus. First, it was offered in obedience to God's revealed will. This lies at the very foundation of all actions which are acceptable unto God: nothing can be pleasing unto Him except that which He has stipulated: every thing else is "will worship" (Col. 2:23). Second, it was offered "by faith": this tells us that there was something more than the mere performance of an outward duty; only that is approved of God which proceeds from the living principle of faith, kindled in the heart by the Holy Spirit. True obedience and faith are never apart: therefore we read of "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5). Yet though inseparable, they are distinguishable in thought: faith respects the

word of promise; obedience the word of command, for promises and precepts go hand in hand. We act in obedience, when the commandment is uppermost in our minds and hearts, which puts us to the performing of duties; we act in faith, when the promise is looked to and the reward is counted upon.

Third, Abel had a "willing mind" (2 Cor. 8:12). Faith works by "love" (Gal. 5:6). This is seen in the fact that he brought of his best: it was "of the firstlings of his flock," which God afterwards took as His portion (Ex. 13:12); when slain, it was the "fat" which he presented which later God also claimed as His own (Lev. 3:16; 7:25). Thus, it was of the most precious and valuable things on earth which Abel brought to God. So it is our best which He requires of us: "Son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26): it is "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10). Fourth, his sacrificial offering looked forward to and adumbrated the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. In all these four things Abel excelled Cain. Cain did not act in obedience, for he disregarded the Divine appointment. He did not offer in faith. Nothing is said of any choice of excellent fruit: it was as though he brought the first which came to hand. His offering contained no foreshadowment of Christ.

Ere passing on, let us seek to gather up the practical teaching of what has been before us. 1. To serve God acceptably we must disregard all human inventions, lean not unto our own understandings or inclinations, and adhere strictly to the revelation which He made of His will. 2. All obedience, service, and worship, must proceed from faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6): where this be lacking, no matter how exact the performance of our duty, it is unacceptable to God. 3. We are to serve God with the best that we have: with the best of our abilities, and with the best of our substance; only as love constrains us will there be a doing it "heartily as unto the Lord." 4. In all our religious exercises Christ must be before us, for only as they are perfumed with His merits can they meet with God's acceptance.

"By which he obtained witness that he was righteous." There is a little uncertainty as to whether the "by which" refers to Abel's "faith" or to the "more excellent sacrifice" which he offered. Though the latter be the nearest antecedent, yet, with Owen, Gouge, and Manton, we believe the reference is to his faith. First, because it is

not the apostle's design in this chapter to specify the kind of sacrifices which were acceptable unto God. Second, because his obvious purpose was to illustrate and demonstrate the efficacy of faith. Third, because the apostle here exemplifies what he had just said of the O.T. saints, namely, that by faith "they obtained a good report" (verse 2). Fourth, because this agrees much more closely with the Analogy of Faith: by the one perfect offering of Christ is the Christian constituted "righteous" before God; but it is through faith that he obtains witness of the same to his heart.

"By which he obtained witness that he was righteous." Herein we are supplied with an illustration of "For them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30). In keeping God's precepts there is "great reward" (Ps. 19:11). God will be no man's debtor: he who obediently, humbly, trustfully, lovingly, respects His appointments and obeys His commandments, shall be recompensed—not as a recognition of merit, but as what is Divinely meet and gracious. God did not leave Abel in a state of uncertainty, ignorant as to whether or not his offering was approved. The Lord was pleased to assure Abel that the sacrifice had been accepted, and that he was accounted just before Him. The Greek word for "he obtained witness" is the same as is rendered "obtained a good report" in verse 2.

"By which he obtained witness that he was righteous." This too is recorded for our instruction and comfort. From these words we learn it is the good pleasure of God that His obedient and believing children should know His mind concerning them. Where there is a justifying faith in Christ which moves the Christian to walk according to the Divine precepts, God honors that faith by granting assurance to its possessor. When we are enabled by faith to plead the most excellent Sacrifice and to present acceptable worship unto God, then we obtain testimony from Him through His Word and by His Spirit that our persons and services are accepted by Him. In Abel's case, He received from God an outward attestation; in the case of the Christian today it is the inward authentication of his conscience (2 Cor. 1:12), to which the Holy Spirit also adds His confirmation (Rom. 8:15).

"God testifying of his gifts." We are not told in Genesis 4 in so many words how He did so, but the Analogy of Faith leaves little room for doubt. By comparing other Scriptures, it may be that the Lord evidenced His acceptance of Abel's offering (and thereby

testified that he was "righteous") by causing fire to descend from heaven and consume the sacrifice, which, in turn, ascended to Him as a sweet-smelling savor. In Leviticus 9:24 we read, "And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat." So too, we are told, "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice" (1 Kings 18:38). Compare also Judges 6:21; 13:19, 20; 1 Chronicles 21:26; Psalm 20:3 margin. There is, however, no certainty on this point.

"By which (faith) he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." The second clause is explanatory of the former: the parallel is found in Genesis 4:4, where we read, "and the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering." He testified in the approbation of his offering, that He had respect unto his person; that is, that He judged, esteemed, and accounted him righteous, for otherwise God is no respecter of persons. Whosoever God accepts or respects, He testifieth him to be righteous, that is, to be justified, and freely accepted with Him. This Abel was by faith, antecedently unto his offering. He was not made righteous, he was not justified by his sacrifice, but therein show his faith by his works; and God, by acceptance of his works of obedience, justified him, as Abraham was justified by works, namely, declaratively, He declared him so to be. Our persons must be first justified, before our works of obedience can be accepted with God; for by that acceptance He testifies that we are righteous (John Owen).

"And by it he being dead yet speaketh." Marvelously full are the words of God. His commandment is "exceeding broad" (Ps. 119:96). In every sentence of Holy Writ there is both a depth and breadth which our unaided minds are incapable of perceiving and appreciating. Only as the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer and Giver of the Word, deigns to "guide" us (John 16:13), only as He teaches us to compare passage with passage, so that in His light we "see light" (Ps. 36:9), are we enabled to discern, in fuller measure, the beauty, meaning, and many-sidedness of any verse or clause. Such is the case in the sentence now before us. We are convinced that there is at least a threefold meaning and reference in it. Briefly, we will consider these in turn.

"And by it he being dead yet speaketh." The first and most obvious signification of these words is that, by his faith's obedience, as recorded in Genesis 4 and Hebrews 11, Abel preaches to us a

most important sermon. His worship and the fruits thereof are registered in the everlasting records of Holy Scripture, and thereby he speaketh as evidently as though we heard him audibly. There comes to us a voice from the far distant past, from the other side of the flood, saying, "Fallen man can only approach unto God through the death of an innocent Substitute: yet none save God's elect will ever feel their need of such, set aside their own inclinations, bow to God's revealed will, and submit to His appointment; but they who do so, obtain witness that they are 'righteous' (cf. Matthew 13:43), and receive Divine assurance that they are accepted in the Beloved and that their obedience (imperfect in itself, yet proceeding from a heart which desires and seeks to fully please Him) is approved for His sake."

"And by it he being dead yet speaketh." And how did he die? By the murderous hand of a religious hypocrite who hated him. Then began that which the apostle affirms still to continue: "he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit" (Gal. 4:29). Here was the first public and visible display of that enmity between the (mystical) seed of the woman and the (mystical) seed of the Serpent. Abel's death was therefore also a pledge and representation of the death of Christ Himself—murdered by the religious world. Those whom God approves must expect to be disproved of men, more particularly by those professing to be Christian. But the time is coming when the present situation shall be reversed. In Genesis 4:10 God said to Cain "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground." Abel's own blood "speaketh," crying to God for vengeance.

"And by it he being dead yet speaketh." Though ruthlessly slain by his brother, the soul of Abel exists in a separate state, alive, conscious, and vocal. He is among that company of whom the apostle said, "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held, and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:9, 10). Thus, Abel is not only a type of the persecution and suffering of the godly, but gives a pledge of the certain vengeance which God will take in due time upon their oppressors. God shall yet avenge His own elect (those in heaven as well as those on earth) who cry unto Him day and night for Him to

avenge them (Luke 18:7, 8). Let us then seek grace to possess our souls in patience, knowing that ere long God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked.

Hebrews 11:5, 6

Chapter 58 - The Faith of Enoch

The apostle makes it his principal design in this chapter to convince the Hebrews of the nature, importance and efficacy of saving faith. In the execution of his design, he first described the essential actings of faith (verse 1), and then in all that follows he treats of the effects, fruits, and achievements of faith. It is blessed to behold how that once more his appeal was to the Holy Scriptures. Not by abstract arguments, still less by bare assertions, would he persuade them; but instead, by setting forth some of the many examples and proofs which the sacred records furnished. Having reminded them of what the faith-obedience of Abel procured, namely, the obtaining of a witness from God that he was righteous, the apostle cites the case of Enoch who exemplifies another aspect and consequent of faith.

The order observed by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 11 is not the historical one. A careful reading of its contents will make this clear. For example, reference is made in verse 9 to Isaac and Jacob before attention is directed to Sarah in verse 11; the falling down of Jericho's walls (verse 30), is mentioned before the faith of Rahab (verse 31); in verse 32 Gideon is mentioned before Barak, Samson before Jephtha, and David before Samuel. Thus it is evident that we are to "search" for something deeper. Since the chronological order is departed from again and again, must there not be a spiritual significance to the way in which the O.T. saints are here referred to? Without a doubt such must be the case. The reason for this is not far to seek: it is the experimental order which is followed in this chapter. If the Lord permits, this will become plainer and plainer as we proceed from verse to verse.

That which the three examples supplied in verses 4 to 7 set before us is an outline of the life of faith. Abel is mentioned first not because he was born before Enoch and Noah, but because what is recorded of him in Genesis 4 illustrated and demonstrated where the life of faith begins. In like manner, Enoch is referred to next not

because he is mentioned before Noah in the book of Genesis, but because what was found in him (or rather, what Divine grace had wrought in him), must precede that which was typified by the builder of the ark. Each of these three men adumbrated a distinct feature or aspect of the life of faith, and the order concerning them is inviolable. Another before us, has characterized them thus: in Abel we see faith's worship, in Enoch faith's walk, in Noah faith's witness. This, we believe, is an accurate and helpful way of stating it, and the more it be pondered, the more its beauty and blessedness should be perceived.

But man ever reverses God's order, and never was this fact more plainly evident to the anointed eye than in these degenerate times in which our lot is cast. Witnessing and working ("service") is what are so much emphasized today. Yet dear reader, Hebrews 11 does not begin with the example of Noah. No indeed. Noah was preceded by Enoch, and for this reason: there can be no Divinely-acceptable witness or work unless and until there is a walking with God! Enoch's walk with God must come before any service which is pleasing to Him. Alas that this is so much lost sight of now. Alas that, so generally, as soon as a young person makes profession of being a Christian, he or she is pushed into some form of "Christian activity"—open-air speaking, personal work, teaching a Sunday school class—when God's word so plainly says, "Not a novice (margin, "one newly come to the faith") lest being lifted up with pride (which almost always proves to be the case) he fall into the condemnation of the Devil" (1 Tim. 3:6).

O how much we miss and lose through failing to give close heed to the order of God's words. Frequently have we emphasized this fact in these pages, yet not too frequently. God is a God of order, and the moment we depart from His arrangements, confusion, with all its attendant evils, at once ensues. We cannot pay too strict attention to the order in which things are presented to us in Holy Writ, for only as we do so, are we in the position to learn some of its most salutary lessons and admire its heavenly wisdom. Such is the case here. Enoch's walk of faith must precede Noah's witnessing by faith; and this, in turn, must be preceded by Abel's worship of faith. There must be that setting aside of our own preferences and ways, that bowing to God's will, that submitting to His appointments, that obedience to His requirements, before there can be any real walking

with Him. Obedience to Him, then walking with Him, then witnessing for Him, is Heaven's unchanging order.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (verse 5). The case of Abel shows us where the life of faith begins; the example of Enoch teaches us of what the life of faith consists. Now just as we had to refer to Genesis 4 to understand Hebrews 11:4, so we have to turn back to Genesis 5 for its light to be thrown upon our present verse.

"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). Here we have set forth, in the form of a brief summary, the new life of the believer: to "walk with God." Previously, Enoch had "walked according to the course of this world" (Eph. 2:2), had gone his "own way" (Isa. 53:6) of self-pleasing, and unconcerned about the future, had thought only of the present. But now he had been "reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), for "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). The term "walk" signifies a voluntary act, a steady advance, a progress in spiritual things. To "walk with God" imports a life surrendered to God, a life controlled by God, a life lived for God. It is to that our present verse has reference.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." It should be obvious to any Spirit-taught heart that we need to look beneath the surface here if we are to discover the spiritual principle of the verse, and seek grace to apply it to ourselves. As a mere historical statement it is doubtless a very interesting one, yet as such it imparts no strength to my needy soul. The bare fact that a man who walked this earth thousands of years ago escaped death may astonish, but it supplies no practical help. What we wish to press upon the reader is, the need for asking each portion of Scripture he reads, the question, What is there here, what practical lesson, to help me while I am left on earth? Nor is this always discovered in a moment: prayer, patience, meditation are required.

As we endeavor to study our verse with the object of ascertaining its practical meaning and message for us today, the first thing the thoughtful ponderer will notice is the repetition of the word

"translated": this occurring no less than three times in one verse, is evidently the keyword. According to its etymology, "translated" signifies to carry across, to bear up, to remove, to change from one place to another. This at once brings to mind (if the Word of Christ be dwelling in us richly) that verse, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). This refers to the grand fact of the Christian's present standing and state before God: he has "passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Now it is the Christian's privilege and duty to live in the power of this fact, and have it made good in his actual case and experience; and this will be so, just in proportion as he is enabled to live and walk by faith.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death". the word "see" here has the force of taste or experience. Enoch was not to be overcome by death: but let us not limit our thoughts unto physical death. Just as Enoch's "translation" from earth to heaven has a deeper meaning than the natural, so "that he should not see death" signifies more than an escape from the grave. "Death" is the wages of sin, the curse of the broken law. We are living in a world which is under God's righteous curse and death is plainly stamped across everything in it. But when faith is in exercise, the soul is lifted above this scene, and its favored possessor is enabled to "walk in newness of life." As we saw when pondering the opening verse, it is the nature of faith to bring near things future, and to obtain proof and enjoyment of what is invisible to natural sight. Just so far as we walk by faith, is the heart "translated," raised above this poor world; and then it is we experience the "power of His (Christ's) resurrection" (Phil. 3:10).

Let us now link verses 4 and 5 together, observing their doctrinal force. When a sinner, by surrender to God and faith in the sacrifice of Christ, is pronounced righteous by the Judge of all, he is made an heir of eternal life, and sin and death can no more have dominion over him: that is, no longer have any legal claim upon him. It is this which is illustrated here: the very next saint who is mentioned after Abel, was taken to Heaven without dying, thereby demonstrating that the power of "death" over the Christian has been annulled. First a sinner saved through the blood of the Lamb (Abel), then a saved sinner removed from earth to Heaven, and nothing between. How inexpressibly blessed! Words fail us, and we can but

bow in silent wonderment, and worship. How "great" is God's salvation!

Now that which is a fact of Christian doctrine needs to become a fact of Christian experience: we need to enjoy the good, the power, the blessedness of it in our souls day by day. And this can only be as a supernatural faith is in exercise. A bare knowledge of doctrine is practically worthless, unless the heart earnestly seeks from God a practical out-working of it. It is one thing to believe that I have judicially passed from death unto life, it is quite another to live practically in the realm of LIFE. But that is exactly what a life of faith is: it is a being lifted above the things which are seen, and a being occupied with those things which are unseen. It is for the affections to be no longer set on things on the earth, but to have them fixed on things in Heaven.

Perhaps the reader is inclined to say, The ideal you set before us is indeed beautiful, but it is impossible for flesh and blood to attain unto it. Quite true, dear friend; we fully grant it. Of himself the Christian can no more live practically upon resurrection-ground than Enoch could transport himself to Heaven. But observe carefully the very next words in our wonderful text: "because God had translated him." Again we beg you not to carnalize these words, and see in them only a reference to his bodily removal to Heaven; or to see in them nothing more than a type and pledge of the Rapture—the fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17: that is the prophetic significance; but there is a spiritual meaning and practical application also, and this is what we so much desire to make clear unto each spiritual reader.

Enoch's translation to heaven was a miracle, and that which is spiritually symbolized is a supernatural experience. The whole Christian life, from start to finish, is a supernatural thing. The new birth is a miracle of grace, for one who is dead in trespasses and sins can no more regenerate himself than he can create a world. A spiritual repentance and spiritual faith are imparted by "the operation of God" (Col. 2:12), for a fallen creature can no more originate them than he could give himself being. To have the heart divorced from the world, to be brought to hate the things we once loved and to now love the things we once hated, is the alone fruitage of the all-mighty work of the Holy Spirit. And for the heart to function in the realm of resurrection-life, while its possessor is left in a scene of death, can

only be made possible and become actual as the supernatural grace of God sustains and calls into exercise a supernatural faith. Only God can daily wean our hearts from the things of this world of death and bring us into real communion with the Prince of Life.

A word of caution here. Let us be on our guard against fatalistically folding our arms and saying, God has not ordained that I should live the translated life. True, God is sovereign and distributes His favors as He pleases. True, He grants more grace to some of His own people than to others of them. Yet it is also written that, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). Moreover, observe well the next words in our text: "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Ah, does not that explain why our faith is so feeble, and why the things of earth forge such heavy chains about our hearts? God is not likely to strengthen and increase our faith while we are so largely indifferent to His pleasure. There must first be the daily, diligent, prayerful striving to please Him in all things; this is absolutely essential if we are to enter into the experience of the translated life.

Let us seek to anticipate a possible objection. Some may be saying, The translated life—the continuous exercise of faith which frees the heart from the grave-clothes of this world—is so exceedingly difficult these days. Then let us remind you of the times in which Enoch lived. It was just before the Flood, and probably conditions then were far worse than they are now. "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints: To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15). It must be remembered that those words had an historical force, as well as a prophetic. Thus, a life of pleasing God, of walking with Him, of the heart being lifted above the world, was no easier then than now. Yet Divine grace made this actual in Enoch; and that grace is as potent today as it was then.

Oftentimes it is helpful to reverse the clauses of a verse so as to perceive more clearly their relation. In order to illustrate this, and because we are so anxious for the reader to lay hold of the vitally-important teaching of Hebrews 11:5, we will treat it accordingly. "Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

Do I? Do you? That is a most timely inquiry. If we are not "pleasing God," then the more knowledge we have of His truth, the worse for us. "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47). God will not be mocked. Fair words and reverent postures cannot deceive Him. It is not how much light do I have, but how far am I in complete subjection to the Lord?

"God had translated him." Of course He did. God always honors those who honor Him; but let us remember that same verse adds, "And they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:30). God is too holy to encourage self-pleasing and put a premium upon self-indulgence. While we gratify the flesh, the blessing of the Spirit will be withheld. While our hearts are so much occupied with the concerns of earth, He will not make the things of Heaven real and efficacious to us. O my reader, if God be not working mightily in your life and mine, showing Himself strong on our behalf (2 Chron. 16:9), then something is seriously wrong with us.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death." Remember what was before us in the preceding article: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation. Faith must have a foundation to rest upon, and that foundation must be the word of Him that cannot lie. God had spoken, and Enoch believed. But what a testing of faith! God declared that Enoch should be removed from earth to Heaven, without passing through the portals of the grave. One, two, three hundred years passed; but Enoch believed God, and before the fourth century was completed His promise was fulfilled. "That he should not see death" was the reward of his pleasing God. And He does not change: where there is a genuine "pleasing" of Him, a real walking with Him, He elevates the heart above this scene into the realm of life, light and liberty.

Ere passing on to the next verse, let us enumerate other points of interest and value contained in this one, though we can do no more than barely mention them. 1. God is not tied to the order of nature: Genesis 3:19 was set aside in the cases of Enoch and Elijah. 2. God puts great outward (providential) differences between those equally accepted by Him: He did so between Abel and Enoch. 3. To exhibit the world's enmity God suffered Abel to be martyred, to comfort His people God preserved Enoch. 4. What God did for

Enoch He can and will yet do for a whole generation of His saints (1 Cor. 15:51). 5. There is a future life for believers: the removal of Enoch to Heaven plainly intimated this. 6. The body is partaker with the soul in life eternal: the corporeal translation of Enoch showed this. 7. The godliest do not always live the longest: all mentioned in Genesis 5 stayed on earth a much greater time than did Enoch. 8. They who live with God hereafter must learn to please God ere they depart hence. 9. They who walk with God please Him. 10. They who please God shall not lack testimony thereof.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (verse 6). The apostle had just spoken of Enoch's translation as a consequent of his pleasing God, and now from the fact of his pleasing God, proves his faith. The adversative particle "But" is used to introduce a syllogism. The argument is framed thus: God Himself had translated Enoch, who before his translation had pleased Him (as his translation evidenced); but without faith it is impossible to please God:—therefore Enoch was by faith translated. Thus, this declaration in verse 6 has special reference to the last clause in the verse preceding. The argument is drawn from the impossibility of the contrary: as it is impossible to please God without faith, and as Enoch received testimony that he did please God, then he must have had faith—a justifying and sanctifying faith.

While there is an intimate relation between our present verse and the one immediately preceding, and while as we shall yet see (the Lord willing) that it is closely connected with the case of Noah in verse 7, yet it also makes its own particular contribution unto the theme which the apostle is here developing, supplying both a solemn warning and a blessed encouragement. The Holy Spirit still had before Him the special need of the wavering Hebrews, and would press upon them the fact that the great thing God required was not attendance on outward ordinances, but the diligent seeking unto Him by a whole-hearted trust. Where faith was missing, nothing could meet with His approval; but where faith really existed and was exercised, it would be richly rewarded. This principle is unchanging, so that the central message of our verse speaks loudly to us today, and should search the heart of each one of us.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him." Most

solemnly do these words attest the total depravity of man. So corrupt is the fallen creature, both in soul and body, in every power and part thereof, and so polluted is everything that issues from him, that he cannot of and by himself do anything that is acceptable to the Holy One. "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8): "they that are in the flesh" means, they that are still in their natural or unregenerate state. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters. But faith looks out of self to Christ, applies unto His righteousness, pleads His worth and worthiness, and does all things God-ward in the name and through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. Thus, by faith we may please God.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him." Yet in all ages there have been many who attempted to please God without faith. Cain began it, but failed woefully. All in their Divine worship profess a desire to please God, and hope that they do so; why otherwise should they make the attempt? But, as the apostle declares in another place, many seek unto God "but not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law" (Rom. 9:32).

But where faith be lacking, let men desire, design, and do what they will, they can never attain unto Divine acceptance. "But to Him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for ("unto") righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). Whatever be the necessity of other graces, faith is that which alone obtains acceptance with God.

In order to please God four things must concur, all of which are accomplished by faith. First, the person of him that pleaseth God must be accepted of Him (Gen. 4:4). Second, the thing done that pleaseth God must be in accord with His will (Heb. 13:21). Third, the manner of doing it must be pleasing to God: it must be performed in humility (1 Cor. 15:10), in sincerity (Isa. 38:3), in cheerfulness (2 Cor. 8:12; 9:7). Fourth, the end in view must be God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Now faith is the only means whereby these four requirements are met. By faith in Christ the person is accepted of God. Faith makes us submit ourselves to God's will. Faith causes us to examine the manner of what we do Godwards. Faith aims at God's glory: of Abraham it is recorded that he "was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20).

How essential it is then that each of us examine himself diligently and make sure that he has faith. It is by faith the convicted

and repentant sinner is saved (Acts 16:31). It is by faith that Christ dwells in the heart (Eph. 3:17). It is by faith that we live (Gal. 2:20). It is by faith that we stand (Rom. 11:20; 2 Corinthians 1:24). It is by faith we walk (2 Cor. 5:7). It is by faith the Devil is successfully resisted (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). It is by faith we are experimentally sanctified (Acts 26:18). It is by faith we have access to God (Eph. 3:12, Hebrews 10:22). It is by faith that we fight the good fight (1 Tim. 6:12). It is by faith that the world is overcome (1 John 5:4). Reader, are you certain that you have the "faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1)? If not, it is high time you make sure, for "without faith it is impossible to please God."

Hebrews 11:6, 7

Chapter 59 - The Faith of Noah

The verses which are now to engage our attention are by no means free of difficulty, especially unto those who have sat under a ministry which has failed to preserve the balance between Divine grace and Divine righteousness. Where the free favor of God has been strongly emphasized and His claims largely ignored, where privileges have been stressed and duties almost neglected, it is far from easy to view many Scriptures in their true perspective. When those who have heard little more than the decrying of creature-abilities and the denunciation of creature-merits are asked to honestly and seriously face the terms of Hebrews 11:6, 7, they are quite unable to fit them into their system of theology. Where such be the case, it is proof positive that something is wrong with our theology. Often those who are least cramped by sectarian bias find that the truth of God is too large, too many-sided, to be squeezed into human definitions and creeds.

Others of our readers are probably wondering what it is we have reference to above when we say that our present portion of Hebrews 11 is by no means free of difficulty. Then let us raise a few questions upon these verses. If the exercise of faith be pleasing to God, does this signify that it is a thing meritorious? How is this concept to be avoided in the light of the statement that God is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him? How does a "reward" consist with pure grace? And what is the doctrinal force of the next verse? Does the case of Noah teach salvation by works? If he had not gone to so much expense and labor in building the ark, would he and his house have escaped the flood? Was his becoming "heir of righteousness" something that he earned by his obedient toil? How can this conclusion be fairly avoided? We shall endeavor to keep these questions before us in the course of our exposition.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (verse 6). There is a threefold

"coming to God": an initial, a continuous, and a final. The first takes place at conversion, the second is repeated throughout the Christian's life, the third occurs at death or the second coming of Christ. To come to God signifies to seek and have fellowship with Him. It denotes a desire to enter into His favor and become a partaker of His blessings in this life and of His salvation in the life to come. It is the heart's approach unto Him in and through Christ: John 14:6, Hebrews 7:25. But before there is a conscious access to Him, God has to be diligently sought.

None come to God, none truly seek Him, until they are made conscious of their lost condition. The Spirit must first work in the soul a realization that sin has alienated us "from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18). We have to be made to feel that we are away from God, out of His favor, under His righteous condemnation, before we shall really do as the prodigal did, and say "I will arise and go to My Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee" (Luke 15:18). The same principle holds good in connection with the repeated "coming" of the Christian (1 Pet. 2:4); it is a sense of need which causes us to seek Him who is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. There is also a maintained communion with God in the performance of holy duties: in all the exercises of godliness we renew our access to God in Christ: in reading of or hearing His Word, we come to Him as Teacher, in prayer we come to Him as Benefactor.

But to seek God aright, He has to be sought in faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him," therefore, "he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." There has to be first a firm persuasion of His being, and second of His bounty. To believe that "He is" means much more than assenting to the fact of a "First Cause" or to allow that there is a "Supreme Being"; it means to believe in the character of God as He has revealed Himself in His works, in His Word, and in Christ. He must be conceived of aright, or otherwise we are only pursuing a phantom of our own imagination. Thus, to believe that "God is" is to exercise faith upon Him as such a Being as His Word declares Him to be: supreme sovereign, ineffably holy, almighty, inflexibly just, yet abounding in mercy and grace toward poor sinners through Christ.

Not only is the heart to go out unto God as His being and

character is revealed in Scripture, but particularly, faith is to lay hold of His graciousness: that He is "a Rewarder" etc. The acting of faith toward God as a "Rewarder" is the heart's apprehension and anticipation of the fact that He is ready and willing to conduct Himself to needy sinners in a way of bounty, that He will act in all things toward them in a manner suitable unto the proposal of which He makes of Himself through the Gospel. It was the realization of this (in addition to his felt need) which stirred the prodigal to act. Just as it would be useless to pray unless there were an hope that God hears and that He will answer prayer, so no sinner will really seek unto God until there is born in his heart an expectation of mercy from Him, that He will receive him graciously. This is a laying hold of His promise.

In Scripture, privileges are propounded with their necessary limitations, and we disjoint the whole system of Truth if we separate the recompense from the duty. There is something to be done on our part: God is a "Rewarder," but of whom? Of those who "diligently seek Him." "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, all the nations that forget God" (Ps. 9:17): not only "deny," but "forget" Him; as they cast God out of their thoughts and affections, so He will cast them out of His presence. What is meant by "diligently seek Him"? To "seek" God is to forsake, deny, go out of self, and take Him alone for our Ruler and satisfying Portion. To seek Him "diligently" is to seek Him early (Prov. 8:17), whole-heartedly (Ps. 119:10), earnestly (Ps. 27: 4), unweariedly (Luke 11:8). How does a thirsty man seek water? The promise is, "And ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13 and cf. 2 Chronicles 15:15).

And how does God "reward" the diligent seeker? By offering Himself graciously to be found of them who penitently, earnestly, trustfully approach Him through the appointed Mediator. By granting them access into His favor: this He did not unto Cain, who sought Him in a wrong manner. By actually bestowing His favor upon them, as He did upon the prodigal. By forgiving their sins and blotting out their iniquities (Isa. 55:7). By writing His laws in their hearts, so that they now desire and determine to forsake all idols and serve Him only. By giving them assurance of their acceptance in the Beloved, and granting them sweet foretastes of the rest and bliss which awaits them on High. By ministering to their every need, both

spiritual and temporal. Finally, by taking them to heaven, where they shall spend eternity in the unclouded enjoyment of the wondrous riches of His grace.

But does this word "Rewarder" have a legalistic ring to it? Not if it be understood rightly. Does it signify that our "diligent seeking" is a meritorious performance which is entitled to recognition? Of course it does not. What, then, is meant? First, let us quote from the helpful comments of John Owen: "That which these words of the apostle hath respect to, and which is the ground of the faith here required, is contained in the revelation that God made of Himself unto Abraham, 'Fear not: Abram: I am thy shield, and they exceeding great reward' (Gen. 15:1). God is so a rewarder unto them that seek Him, as that He is Himself their reward, which eternally excludes all thoughts of merit in them that are so rewarded. Who can merit God to be his reward? Rewarding in God, especially where He Himself is the reward, is an act of infinite grace and bounty. And this gives us full direction unto the object of faith here intended, namely, God in Christ, as revealed in the promise of Him, giving Himself unto believers as a reward, (to be their God) in a way of infinite goodness and bounty. The proposal hereof, is that alone which gives encouragement to come unto Him, which the apostle designs to declare."

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Rom. 4:4): is not the implication clear that grace itself also "rewards"? Grace and reward are no more inconsistent than the high sovereignty of God and the real responsibility of man, or between the fact that Christ is and was both "Servant" (Isa. 42:1) and "Lord" (John 13:13). The language of Colossians 3:24 makes this clear as a sunbeam: "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." The "inheritance" is Heaven itself, salvation in its consummation. But is not salvation a free gift? Yes, indeed; nevertheless it has to be "bought" by its recipients (Isa. 55:1), yet "without money and without price." Salvation is both a "gift" and a "reward."

While it be true that Heaven cannot be earned by the sinner, it is equally true that Heaven is not for idlers and loiterers. God has to be "diligently sought." To enter the strait gate the soul has to agonize (Luke 13:24). We are called upon to "labor" for that meat which endureth unto eternal life (John 6:27) and to enter into the

heavenly rest (Heb. 4:11). Such efforts God "rewards," not because they are meritorious, but because He deems it meet to recognize and recompense them. There are those who teach that in serving God we ought to have no "respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26), but this verse refutes them, for the apostle explicitly declares that this forms a necessary part of that truth which is to be believed in order to our pleasing God.

Heaven, or completed salvation, is spoken of as a "reward" to intimate the character of those to whom it is given, namely, the diligent laborer. Second, because it is not bestowed until our work is completed: 2 Timothy 4:7, 8. Third, to intimate the sureness of it: we may as confidently expect it as does the laborer who has been hired by an honest master: James 1:12. This "reward" is principally in the next life: Hebrews 11:16, 2 Corinthians 4:17—it is then that all true godliness shall be richly recompensed: Mark 10:29, 30. It only remains for us now to add that the ground on which God bestows the "reward" is the infinite merits of Christ, and out of respect unto His own promise. That which He "rewards" is the work of His own Spirit within us, so that we have no ground for boasting.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (verse 7).

The apostle now presents a concrete example which illustrates what he had said in verse 6. God's dealings with Noah and the world in his time were plainly a sample and pledge of His dealing with the world in all ages, particularly so when its history is finally wound up. Inasmuch as God is the Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, it necessarily follows that He is also the Revenger of all who despise Him. In the destruction of the old world, God showed His displeasure against sin (Job 22:15, 16); in the preservation of Noah, He made manifest the privileges of His own people (2 Pet. 2:9). That the whole was a pledge and type is clear from 2 Peter 3:6, 7.

In the verse which is now before us three things claim attention. First, Noah's faith and its ground, namely the warning he had received from God. Second, the effects of his faith, namely, internally, the impulse of "fear"; externally, his obedience in making the ark under God's orders. Third, the consequences of his faith,

namely, the saving of his house, the condemning of the world, his becoming heir of the righteousness which is by faith. But ere taking up these points, let us face and endeavor to remove a difficulty which some feel this verse raises. Let us put it this way: was Noah saved by his own works? We believe the answer is both Yes, and No. We beg the reader to exercise patience and prayerfully ponder what follows, and not cry out rank heresy and refuse to read further.

If Noah had not "prepared an ark" in obedience to God's command, would he not have perished in the flood? Then was it his own efforts which preserved him from death in the great deluge? No indeed; it was the preserving power of God. That ark had neither mast, sail, nor steering-wheel: only the gracious hand of the Lord kept that frail barque from being splintered to atoms on the rocks and the mountains. Then what is the relation between these two things? This: Noah made use of the means which God had prescribed, and by His grace and power those means were made effectual unto his preservation. Must not the farmer toil in his fields? yet it is God alone who gives him the increase. Must I not observe the laws of hygiene and eat wholesome food? yet only as God blesses them to me am I kept in health. So it is in spiritual things: salvation by grace alone does not exclude the imperative necessity of our using the means which God has appointed and prescribed.

The temporal deliverance of Noah from the flood is undoubtedly an adumbration of the eternal deliverance of God's elect from the wrath to come: and here, as everywhere, the type is accurate and perfect. Nor can any sophistical quibbling honestly get rid of the fact that Noah's building of the Ark—a most costly and arduous work!—was a means towards his preservation. Then does the case of Noah supply a clear example of salvation by works? Again we answer boldly, Yes and No. But the difficulty is greatly relieved if we bear in mind that Noah was already a saved man before God bade him build the Ark! A reference to Genesis 6:8, 9 and a comparison with Hebrews 6:14, 22 makes this unmistakably plain. But does not this fact overthrow all that has been said in the previous paragraphs? Not at all. The Christian's salvation is not only a past thing (2 Tim. 1:9), but a present (Phil. 2:12) and future (Rom. 13:11) thing too! We trust that the solution of the difficulty will be more evident as we proceed with our exposition of the verse.

As we have before pointed out, the first three verses of

Hebrews 11 are introductory, their design being to set forth the importance and excellency of faith. Then, in verse 4-7, we have an outline of the life of faith: the beginning of it is seen in verse 4, the nature of what it consists in verse 5, a warning and encouragement is supplied in verse 6, and the end of it is shown in verse 7. Before bringing before us the glorious goal which the life of faith reaches, verse 7 gives us the other side of what was before us in verse 5: there we saw faith elevating above a world of death, carrying the heart of its favored possessor into Heaven. But we are still in the world, and that is the place of opposition, of danger, and hence, of testing. Thus in verse 7 we are not only shown what faith obtains, but how it obtains, it.

Now as we found it necessary to go back to Genesis 3 and 4 to interpret Hebrews 11:4, and to Genesis 5:24 to get the meaning of Hebrews 11:5, so now we have to consult Genesis 6 in order to discover what is here adumbrated. Let the reader turn back to Genesis 6:5-22. There we find unsparing Divine judgment announced (verse 13), a way of deliverance presented to one who had "found grace" in the Lord's eyes (verse 14), faith's obedience called for if escape was to be had from judgment (verse 14), the Divinely prescribed means to be used (verse 15); by employing those means deliverance was obtained. Now in like manner, a most solemn warning has been given us, an announcement of coming judgment: see 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:10-17—let the reader duly observe that both of these passages are found in epistles addressed to God's children.

In saying above that Hebrews 11:7 gives us the other side of what is spiritually set forth in verse 5, we mean that it gives us the balancing truth. It is most important to observe this, for otherwise we are very liable to entertain a mystical concept of verse 5 and become lopsided. Satan is ready to tell us that verse 5 presents to us a beautiful ideal, but one which is altogether impracticable for ordinary people—alright for preachers, but impossible for others. After reading our article on verse 5, many are likely to exclaim: We cannot be thinking of heavenly things all the time, we have our daily duties to attend to here on earth: the only way we could reach the standard of verse 5 would be by entering a monastery or convent, entirely secluding ourselves from the world; and surely God does not require this of us. No, indeed; that was the great mistake of the

"Dark Ages."

"By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." This gives us the other side of verse 5. It shows that we have duties to perform on earth, and intimates how they are to be discharged—by faith, in the fear of God, implicitly obeying His commands. And more: our present verse insists on the fact (now so little apprehended) that, the performing these duties, the rendering of faith's obedience to God, is indispensably necessary to our very salvation. The "salvation" of the soul is yet future: note "saving" and not "salvation" in Hebrews 10:39, and also compare 1 Peter 1:5. In order to be saved from the destructive power of sin, the ruinous allurements of the world, and the devouring assaults of Satan, we must tread the path of obedience to Christ (Heb. 5:9), for only there do we escape these fatal foes. Let the reader prayerfully ponder Mark 9:43-50; Luke 14:26, 27, 33; Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 3:12, 14.

Hebrews 11:5 and 7 supplement each other. Verse 5 shows us that by the exercise of faith our affections are elevated above the earth and set upon things above. Verse 7 teaches us that our lives on earth are to be regulated by heavenly principles. The real Christian is a heavenly man living on earth as a heavenly man; that is to say, he is governed by spiritual and Divine principles, and not by fleshly motives and worldly interests. The Christian performs many of the same deeds as the non-Christian does, yet with a far different object and aim. All that I do should be done in obedience to God, in joyous response to His revealed will. Let us be specific and come to details. Let the Christian wife read Ephesians 5:22-24 and the husband 5:25-31, and let each recognize that in obeying the husband and loving the wife, they are obeying God. Let Christian employees ponder Ephesians 6:5-7, and recognize that in obeying their masters they are obeying the Lord; contrariwise, in sulking or speaking against them, they murmur against the Lord!

Now such obedience to God's commandments in the ordinary relationships of life are necessary unto salvation. If this staggers the reader, let him contemplate the opposite. Those precepts and commands have been given us by God, and to disregard them is rebellion, and to refuse compliance is defiance; and no rebel against God can enter Heaven. Unless our wills have been broken, unless

our hearts have been brought into subjection to God, we have no scriptural warrant for concluding that He has begun a good work in us (Phil. 1:6). "He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). The only path which leads to heaven is that of walking in obedience to God's commands.

Now the salvation of the soul lies at the end of that path. Does the reader exclaim, I thought it was at the beginning of it, and that none but a regenerate person could or would walk therein. From one standpoint that is quite true. When genuinely converted a sinner is saved from the eternal penalty of his sins, and is "delivered from the wrath to come." But is he there and then removed to Heaven? With very rare exceptions he is not. Instead, God leaves him here in this world. And this world is the place of danger, for temptations to return unto its ways and pleasures abound on every side. Moreover, the judgment of God hangs over it, and one day will burst upon and consume it. And who will escape that destruction? Only those who, like Noah, have a faith which is moved with fear and produces obedience. But it is now high time that we considered more closely the details of verse 7.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." Ah, here is the key to our verse, hung right upon the very door of it. Like every other one of God's elect, Noah was saved by grace through faith; and yet not by a faith that was inactive—Ephesians 2:10 follows verse 9! Faith was the spring of all his works: a faith which was far more than an intellectual assent, one which was a supernatural principle that sovereign grace had wrought in him. God had determined to send a flood and destroy the wicked world, but ere doing so, He acquainted Noah with His purpose. He has done the same with us: see Romans 1:18. That Divine warning was the ground of Noah's faith. He argued not, nor reasoned about its incredibility; instead, he believed God. The threatening, as well as the promise of God, is the object of faith; the justice of God is to be eyed, as well as His mercy!

Human reason was altogether opposed unto what God had made known to Noah. Hitherto there had been no rain (Gen. 2:6), then why expect an overwhelming deluge? It seemed utterly unlikely God would destroy the whole human race, and His mercy

be thus utterly swallowed up by His avenging justice. The threatening judgment was a long way off (120 years: Genesis 6:3), and during that time the world might well repent and reform. When he preached to men (2 Pet. 2:5) none believed his message: why then should he be so fearful, when every one else was at ease? To build an ark of such huge dimensions was an enormous undertaking, and, as well, would involve the scoffs of all his fellows. And even if the flood came, how could the ark float with such an immensely heavy burden—it had no anchor to stay her, no mast and sail to steady her, no steering-wheel to direct. Was it not quite impracticable, for Noah was quite inexperienced nautically. Moreover, for him and his family to dwell for an indefinite period in a sealed ark was far from a pleasant prospect unto the flesh and blood. But against all these carnal objections faith offered a steady resistance, and believed God!

"Moved with fear." This evidenced the reality and power of his faith, for saving faith not only "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), but in "fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). A reverential awe of God is a sure fruit of saving faith. That "fear" acted as a salutary impetus in Noah and operated as a powerful motive in his building of the ark. "His believing the word of God, had this effect on him... a reverential fear it is of God's threatenings, and not an anxious solicitous fear of the evil threatened. In the warning given him, he considered the greatness, the holiness, and the power of God, with the vengeance becoming those holy properties of His nature, which He threatened to bring on the world. Seeing God by faith under this representation of Him, he was filled with a reverential fear of Him. See Habakuk 3:16, Psalm 119:120, Malachi 2:5" (John Owen).

"Prepared an ark to the saving of his house." As Matthew Henry says, "Faith first influences our affections and then our actions." "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20), particularly works of obedience. "Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Gen. 6:22). Privilege and duty are inseparably connected, yet duty will never be performed where faith is absent. Faith in Noah caused him to persevere in his arduous labors amid many difficulties and discouragements. Thus his building of the ark was the work of faith and patience, a labor of Godly fear, an act of obedience, a means to his preservation—for God's covenant with him (Gen. 6:18) did not preclude his diligent

use of means; and a type of Christ. As it was by faith-obedience he prepared the ark, so by faith's obedience came the "saving of his house." God always honors those who honor Him. This temporal salvation was a figure of the eternal salvation unto which we are pressing forward for note that the destruction of the and-deluvians was an eternal one—for their spirits are now "in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19)! Observe it is our responsibility to seek after our own salvation and those committed to us: see Acts 2:40, 2 Timothy 4:16.

"By the which he condemned the world." The reference is to all that precedes. By his own example, by his faith in God's warning, his reverential awe of God's holiness and justice, his implicit and unflagging obedience in preparing the ark, Noah "condemned" the unbelieving, unconcerned, godless people all around him. One man is said to "condemn," another when, by his godly actions, he shows what the other should do, and which by doing not, his guilt is aggravated; see Matthew 12:41, 42. The Sabbath-keeper "condemns" the Sabbath-breaker. He who abandons a worldly church and goes forth unto Christ outside the camp, "condemns" the compromiser. Noah's diligent and costly labors increased the guilt of the careless, who rested in a false security. Though we cannot convert the wicked, yet we must be careful to set before them such an example of personal piety that they are left "without excuse."

"And became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." The "righteousness" here referred to is that perfect obedience of Christ which God imputes unto all who savingly believe on His Son: Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 5:19, 2 Corinthians 5:21. This righteousness is sometimes called, absolutely, the "righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17, etc.), sometimes the "gift of righteousness... by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17), sometimes "the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9); in all of which our free and gratuitous justification by the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account through faith, is intended. In saying that Noah "became heir" of this righteousness, there may be a double significance. First, by faith's obedience he evidenced himself to be a justified man (Gen. 6:9), as Abraham did when he offered up Isaac (James 2:21). Second, he established his title to that righteousness which is here spoken of as an "inheritance": this is in contrast from Esau who despised his. That righteousness which Christ purchased for His people is here

denominated an "inheritance," to emphasize the dignity and excellency of it, to magnify the freeness of its tenure, to declare the certainty and inviolability of it.

The actual entrance upon our Inheritance is yet future. "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). The great question for each of us to settle is, Am I an "heir"? To help us do so, let me inquire, Have I the spirit of one? Is my main care to make sure that I have the birthright? Am I putting the claims of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) above everything else? Have I such thoughts of the blessedness of my portion in Christ that nothing can induce me to sell or part with it (Heb. 12:16)? Is my heart wrapped up in that inheritance so that I am groaning within myself, "waiting for the adoption" (Rom. 8:23)? Am I walking by faith, with the fear of God upon me, diligently attending to His commandments, thereby condemning the world? If so, thrice blessed am I: and soon shall I be saved "to sin no more."

Hebrews 11:8

Chapter 60 - The Call of Abraham

"The scope of the apostle in this chapter is to prove that the doctrine of faith is an ancient doctrine and that faith hath been always exercised about things not seen, not liable to the judgment of sense and reason. He had proved both points by instances of the fathers before the flood, and now he comes to prove them by the examples of those that were eminent for faith after the flood. And in the first place he pitcheth upon Abraham—a fit instance; he was the father of the faithful, and a person of whom the Hebrews boasted; his life was nothing else but a continual practice of faith, and therefore he insisteth upon Abraham longer than upon any other of the patriarchs. The first thing for which Abraham is commended in Scripture is his obedience to God, when He called him out of his country; now the apostle shows this was an effect of faith" (T. Manton, 1660).

The second division of Hebrews 11 begins with the verse which is now to be before us. As pointed out in previous articles, verses 4-7 present an outline of the life of faith. In verse 4 we are shown where the life of faith begins, namely, at that point where the conscience is awakened to our lost condition, where the soul makes a complete surrender to God, and where the heart rests upon the perfect satisfaction made by Christ our Surety. In verse 5 we are shown the character of the life of faith: a pleasing of God, a walking with Him, the heart elevated above this world of death. In verses 6, 7 we are shown the end of the life of faith: a diligent seeking of God, a heart which is moved by His fear to use those means which He appointed and prescribed, issuing in the saving of the soul and establishing its title to be an heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Wonderfully comprehensive are the contents of these opening verses, and well repaid will be the prayerful student who ponders them again and again.

From verse 8 to the end of the chapter, the Holy Spirit gives us fuller details concerning the life of faith, viewing it from different

angles, contemplating varied aspects, and exhibiting the different trials to which it is subject and the blessed triumphs which Divine grace enables it to achieve. Fitly does this new section of our chapter open by presenting to us the case of Abraham. In his days a new and important era of human history commenced. Hitherto God had maintained a general relation to the whole human race, but at the Tower of Babel that relation was broken. It was there that mankind, as a whole, consummated their revolt against their Maker, in consequence of which He abandoned them. To that point is to be traced the origin of "Heathendom": Romans 1:18-30 should be read in this connection. From this point onwards God's dealings with men were virtually confined to Abraham and his posterity.

That a new division of our chapter commences at verse 8 is further evident from the fact that Abraham is designated "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11), which means not only that he is (as it were) the earthly head of the whole election of grace, but the one after whose likeness his spiritual children are conformed. There is a family likeness between Abraham and the true Christian, for if we are Christ's then are we "Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:29), for "they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7), which is evidenced by them doing "the works of Abraham" (John 8:39), for these are the marks of identification. In like manner, Christ declared of the Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts (desires and behests) of your father, ye will (are determined) to do" (John 8:44). The wicked bear the family likeness of the Wicked one. The "fatherhood of Abraham" is twofold: natural, as the progenitor of a physical seed; spiritual, as the pattern to which his children are morally conformed.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (verse 8). In taking up the study of this verse our first concern should be to ascertain its meaning and message for us today. In order to discover this, we must begin by seeking to know what was shadowed forth in the great incident here recorded. A little meditation should make it obvious that the central thing referred to is the Divine call of which Abraham was made the recipient. This is confirmed by a reference to Genesis 12:1, where we have the historical account of that to which the Spirit by the apostle here alludes. Further proof is

furnished by Act 7:2, 3. This, then must be our starting-point.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). There are two distinct kinds of "calls" from God mentioned in Scripture: a general and a particular, an outward and an inward, an inoperative and an effectual. The general, external, and inefficacious "call" is given to all who hear the Gospel, or come under the sound of the Word. This call is refused by all. It is found in such passages as the following: "Unto you, O men, I call; My voice is to the sons of man" (Prov. 8:4); "For many be called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16); "And sent His servant at suppertime to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:17, 18); "Because I have called, and ye refuse; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded" etc. (Prov. 1:24-28).

The special, inward, and efficacious "call" of God comes only to His elect. It is responded to by each favored one who receives it. It is referred to in such passages as the following: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25); "He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when He putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice... and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice" (John 10:3, 4, 16); "Whom He called, them He also justified" (Rom. 8:30); "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (1 Cor. 1:26-27). This call is illustrated and exemplified in such cases as Matthew (Luke 5:27, 28), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5, 6), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:4, 5).

The individual, internal, and invincible call of God is an act of sovereign grace, accompanied by all-mighty power, quickening those who are dead in trespasses and sins, imparting to them spiritual life. This Divine call is regeneration, or the new birth, when its favored recipient is brought "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Now this is what is before us in Hebrews 11:8, which gives additional proof that this verse commences a new section of the chapter. The wondrous call which Abraham received from God is necessarily placed at the head of the Spirit's detailed

description of the life of faith; necessarily, we say, for faith itself is utterly impossible until the soul has been Divinely quickened.

Let us first contemplate the state that Abraham was in until and at the time God called him. To view him in his unregenerate condition is a duty which the Holy Spirit pressed upon Israel of old: "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged: look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you" (Isa. 51:1, 2). Help is afforded if we turn to Joshua 24:2, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods." Abraham, then, belonged to a heathen family, and dwelt in a great city, until he was seventy. No doubt he lived his life after the same manner as his fellows—content with the "husks" which the swine feed upon, with little or no serious thoughts of the Hereafter. Thus it is with each of God's elect till the Divine call comes to them and arrests them in their self-will, mad, and destructive course.

"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran" (Acts 7:2). What marvelous grace! The God of glory condescended to draw near and reveal Himself unto one that was sunk in sin, immersed in idolatry, having no concern for the Divine honor. There was nothing in Abraham to deserve God's notice, still less to merit His esteem. But more: not only was the grace of God here signally evident, but the sovereignty of His grace was displayed in thus singling him out from the midst of all his fellows. As He says in Isaiah 51:2, "I called him alone, and blessed him." "Why God should not call his father and kindred, there can be no answer but this: God hath mercy on whom He will (Rom. 9:18). He calleth Isaac and refuseth Ishmael; loveth Jacob, and hateth Esau; taketh Abel, and leaveth Cain: even because He will, and for no cause that we know" (W. Perkins, 1595).

"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2). All that is included in these words, we know not; as to how God "appeared" unto him, we cannot say. But of two things we may be certain: for the first time in Abraham's life God became a living Reality to him; further, he perceived that He was an all-glorious Being. Thus it is, sooner or later, in the personal experience of each of God's elect. In the midst of their worldliness, self-seeking and self-pleasing, one day He of whom they had but the vaguest notions,

and whom they sought to dismiss from their thoughts, appears before their hearts—terrifying, awakening, and then attracting. Now it is they can say, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee" (Job 42:5).

O dear reader, our desire here is not simply to write an article, but to be used of God in addressing a definite message from Him straight to your inmost heart. Suffer us then to inquire, Do you know anything about what has been said in the above paragraph? Has God become a living Reality to your soul? Has He really drawn near to you, manifested Himself in His awe-inspiring Majesty, and had direct and personal dealings with your soul? Or do you know no more about Him than what others write and say of Him? This is a question of vital moment, for if He does not have personal dealings with you here in a way of grace, He will have personal dealings with you hereafter, in a way of justice and judgment. Then "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6).

This, then, is one important aspect of regeneration: God graciously makes a personal revelation of Himself to the soul. The result is that He "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The favored individual in whom this miracle of grace is wrought, is now brought out of that dreadful state in which he lay by nature, whereby "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). So fearful is that state in which all the unregenerate lie, it is described as "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). But at the new birth the soul is delivered from the terrible darkness of sin and depravity into which the fall of Adam has brought all his descendants, and is ushered into the marvelous and glorious light of God.

Let us next consider the accompaniment or terms of the call which Abraham now received from God. A record of this is found in Genesis 12:1, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." What a testing of faith was this! What a trial to flesh and blood! Abraham

was already seventy years of age, and long journeys and the break-up of old associations do not commend themselves to elderly people. To leave the land of his birth, to forsake home and estate, to sever family ties and leave loved ones behind, to abandon present certainty for (what seemed to human wisdom) a future uncertainty, and go forth not knowing whither, must have seemed hard and harsh unto natural sentiment. Why, then, should God make such a demand? To prove Abraham, to give the death-blow to his natural corruptions, to demonstrate the might of His grace. Yet we must look for something deeper, and that which applies directly to us.

As we have pointed out above, God's appearing to Abraham and his call of him, speaks to us of that miracle of grace which takes place in the soul at regeneration. Now the evidence of regeneration is found in a genuine conversion: it is that complete break from the old life, both inner and outer, which furnishes proof of the new birth. It is plain to any renewed mind that when a soul has been favored with a real and personal manifestation of God, that a move or response is called for from him. It is simply impossible that he should continue his old manner of life. A new Object is before him, a new relationship has been established, new desires now fill his heart, and new responsibilities claim him. The moment a man truly realizes that he has to do with God, there must be a radical change: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new"

(2 Cor. 5:17).

The call which Abraham received from God required a double response from him: he was to leave the land of his birth, and forsake his own kindred. What, then is the spiritual significance of these things? Remember that Abraham was a pattern case, for he is the "father" of all Christians, and the children must be conformed to the family likeness. Abraham is the prototype of those who are "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). Now the spiritual application to us of what was adumbrated by the terms of Abraham's call is twofold: doctrinal and practical, legal and experimental. Let us, briefly, consider them separately.

"Get thee out of thy country" finds its counterpart in the fact that the Christian is one who has been, by grace, the redemptive work of Christ, and the miraculous operation of the Spirit, delivered from his old position. By nature, the Christian was a member of "the

world," the whole of which "lieth in the Wicked one" (1 John 5:19), and so is headed for destruction. But God's elect have been delivered from this: Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God our Father" (Gal. 1:4); therefore does He say unto His own "because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

"Get thee out of thy country" finding its fulfillment, first, in the Christian's being delivered from his old condition, namely, "in the flesh": "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6). He has now been made a member of a new family. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). He is now brought into union with a new "kindred," for all born-again souls are his brethren and sisters in Christ: "They that are in the flesh cannot please God; but ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom. 8:8, 9). Thus, the call of God is a separating one—from our old standing and state, into a new one.

Now what has just been pointed out above is already, from the Divine side, an accomplished fact. Legally, the Christian no longer belongs to "the world" nor is he "in the flesh." But this has to be entered into practically from the human side, and made good in our actual experience. Because our "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), we are to live here as "strangers and pilgrims." A practical separation from the world is demanded of us, for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4); therefore does God say, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . . come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:14, 17). So too the "flesh," still in us, is to be allowed no rein. "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1); "Make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14); "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5).

The claims of Christ upon His people are paramount. He reminds them that, "ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Therefore does He say, "If any man come to

Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Their response is declared in, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). Thus, the terms of the call which Abraham received from God are addressed to our hearts. A complete break from the old life is required of us.

Practical separation from the world is imperative. This was typed out of old in the history of Abraham's descendants. They had settled down in Egypt—figure of the world—and after they had come under the blood of the lamb, and before they entered Canaan (type of Heaven), they must leave the land of Pharaoh. Hence too God says of our Surety "Out of Egypt have I called My Son" (Matthew 2:15): the Head must be conformed to the members, and the members to their Head. Practical mortification of the flesh is equally imperative, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die (eternally): but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (eternally): (Rom. 8:13); "but he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." This verse, read in the light of Genesis 12:1, clearly signifies that God demanded the supreme place in Abraham's affections. His life was no longer to be regulated by self-will, self-love, self-pleasing; self was to be entirely set aside, "crucified." Henceforth, the will and word of God was to govern and direct him in all things. Henceforth he was to be a man without a home on earth, but seeking one in Heaven, and treading that path which alone leads thither.

Now it should be very evident from what has been said above that, regeneration or an effectual call from God is a miraculous thing, as far above the reach of nature as the heavens are above the earth. When God makes a personal revelation of Himself to the soul, this is accompanied by the communication of supernatural grace, which produces supernatural fruit. It was contrary to nature for Abraham to leave home and country, and go forth "not knowing whither he went." Equally it is contrary to nature for the Christian to separate from the world and crucify the flesh. A

miracle of Divine grace has to be wrought within him, before any man will really deny self and live in complete subjection to God. And this leads us to say that, genuine cases of regeneration are much rarer than many suppose. The spiritual children of Abraham are very far from being a numerous company, as is abundantly evident from the fact that few indeed bear his likeness. Out of all the thousands of professing Christians around us, how many manifest Abraham's faith or do Abraham's works?

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." This verse, read in the light upon which we would fix our attention is Abraham's obedience. A roving faith is one which heeds the Divine commands, as well as relies upon the Divine promises. Make no mistake upon this point, dear reader: Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:9). Abraham placed himself unreservedly in the hands of God, surrendered to His lordship, and subscribed to His wisdom as best fitted to direct him. And so must we, or we shall never be "carried into Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22).

Abraham "obeyed, and he went out." There are two things there: "obeyed" signifies the consent of his mind, "and went out" tells of his actual performance. He obeyed not only in word, but in deed. In this, he was in marked contrast from the rebellious one mentioned in Matthew 21:30, "I go, sir, and went not." "The first act of saving faith consists in a discovery and sight of the infinite greatness, goodness, and other excellencies of the nature of God, so as to judge it our duty upon His call, His command, and promise, to deny ourselves, to relinquish all things, and to do so accordingly" (John Owen). Such ought our obedience to be unto God's call, and to every manifestation of His will. It must be a simple obedience in subjection to His authority, without inquiring after the reason thereof, and without objecting any scruples or difficulties against it.

"Observe that faith, wherever it is, bringeth forth obedience: by faith Abraham, being called, obeyed God. Faith and obedience can never be severed; as the sun and the light, fire and heat. Therefore we read of the 'obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5). Obedience is faith's daughter. Faith hath not only to do with the grace of God, but with the duty of the creature. By apprehending grace, it works upon duty: 'faith worketh by love' (Gal. 5:6); it fills the soul with

the apprehensions of God's love, and then makes use of the sweetness of love to urge us to more work or obedience. All our obedience to God comes from love of God, and our love comes from the persuasion of God's love to us. The argument and discourse that is in a sanctified soul is set down thus: 'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me' (Gal. 2:20). Wilt thou not do this for God, that loved thee? for Jesus Christ, that gave Himself for thee? Faith works towards obedience by commanding the affections" (Thomas Manton, 1680).

"He went forth not knowing whither he went." How this demonstrates the reality and power of his faith—to leave a present possession for a future one. Abraham's obedience is the more conspicuous because at the time God called him, He did not specify which land he was to journey to, nor where it was located. Thus, it was by faith and not by sight, that he moved forward. Implicit confidence in the One who had called him was needed on the part of Abraham. Imagine a total stranger coming and bidding you follow him, without telling you where! To undertake a journey of unknown length, one of difficulty and danger, towards a land of which he knew nothing, called for real faith in the living God. See here the power of faith to triumph over fleshly disinclinations, to surmount obstacles, to perform difficult duties. Reader, is this the nature of your faith? Is your faith producing works which are not only above the power of mere nature to perform, but also directly contrary thereto?

Abraham's faith is hard to find these days. There is much talk and boasting, but most of it is empty words—the works of Abraham are conspicuous by their absence, in the vast majority of those who claim to be his children. The Christian is required to set his affections on things above, and not on things below (Col. 3:2). He is required to walk by faith, and not by sight; to tread the path of obedience to God's commands, and not please himself; to go and do whatever the Lord bids him. Even if God's commands appear severe or unreasonable, we must obey them: "Let no man deceive himself: if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18); "And He said to them all, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

But such an obedience as God requires can only proceed

from a supernatural faith. An unshakable confidence in the living God, and unreserved surrender to His holy will, each step of our lives being ordered by His word (<19B9105>Psalm 119:105), can only issue from a miraculous work of grace which He has Himself wrought in the heart. How many there are who profess to be God's people yet only obey Him so long as they consider that their own interests are being served! How many are unwilling to quit trading on the Sabbath because they fear a few dollars will be lost! Now just as a traveler on foot, who takes a long journey through an unknown country, seeks a reliable guide, commits himself to his leading, trusts to his knowledge, and follows him implicitly o'er hill and dale, so God requires us to commit ourselves fully unto Him, trusting His faithfulness, wisdom and power, and yielding to every demand which He makes upon us.

"He went forth not knowing whither he went." Most probably many of his neighbors and acquaintances in Chaldea would inquire why he was leaving them, and where he was bound for. Imagine their surprise when Abraham had to say, I know not. Could they appreciate the fact that he was walking by faith and not by sight? Would they commend him for following Divine orders? Would they not rather deem him crazy? And, dear reader, the Godless will no more understand the motives which prompt the real children of God today, than could the Chaldeans understand Abraham; the unregenerate professing Christians all around us, will no more approve of our strict compliance with God's commands, than did Abraham's heathen neighbors. The world is governed by the senses, not faith; lives to please self, not God. And if the world does not deem you and me crazy, then there is something radically wrong with our hearts and lives.

One other point remains to be considered, and we must reluctantly conclude this article. The obedience of Abraham's faith was unto "a land which he should afterward receive for an inheritance" (verse 8). Literally, that "inheritance" was Canaan; spiritually, it foreshadowed Heaven. Now had Abraham refused to make the radical break which he did from his old life, crucify the affections of the flesh, and leave Chaldea, he had never reached the promised land. The Christian's "Inheritance" is purely of grace, for what can any man do in time to earn something which is eternal? Utterly impossible is it for any finite creature to perform anything

which deserves an infinite reward. Nevertheless, God has marked out a certain path which conducts to the promised Inheritance: the path of obedience, the "Narrow Way" which "leadeth unto Life" (Matthew 7:14), and only those ever reach Heaven who tread that path to the end.

As the utmost confusion now reigns upon this subject, and as many are, through an unwarranted reserve, afraid to speak out plainly thereon, we feel obliged to add a little more. Unqualified obedience is required from us: not to furnish title to Heaven—that is found alone in the merits of Christ; not to fit us for Heaven—that is supplied alone by the supernatural work of the Spirit in the heart; but that God may be owned and honored by us as we journey thither, that we may prove and manifest the sufficiency of H's grace, that we may furnish evidences we are HIS children, that we may be preserved from those things which would otherwise destroy us—only in the path of obedience can we avoid those foes which are seeking to slay us.

O dear reader, as you value your soul we entreat you not to spurn this article, and particularly its closing paragraphs, because its teaching differs radically from what you are accustomed to hear or read. The path of obedience must be trod if ever you are to reach Heaven. Many are acquainted with that path or "way," but they walk not therein: see 2 Peter 2:20. Many, like Lot's wife, make a start along it, and then turn from it: see Luke 9:62. Many follow it for quite a while, but fail to persevere; and, like Israel of old, perish in the wilderness. No rebel can enter Heaven; one who is wrapped up in self cannot; no disobedient soul will. Only those will partake of the heavenly "inheritance" who are "children of Abraham," who have his faith, follow his examples, perform his works. May the Lord deign to add His blessing to the above, and to Him shall be all the praise.

Hebrews 11:9, 10

Chapter 61 - The Life of Abraham

In the preceding article we considered the appearing of the Lord unto idolatrous Abraham in Chaldea, the call which he then received to make a complete break from his old life, and to go forward in faith in complete subjection to the revealed will of God. This we contemplated as a figure and type, an illustration and example of one essential feature of regeneration, namely, God's effectually calling His elect from death unto life, out of darkness into His marvelous light, with the blessed fruits this produces. As we saw on the last occasion, a mighty change was wrought in Abraham, so that his manner of life was completely altered: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Ere turning unto the verses which are to form our present portion, let us first ask and seek to answer the following question: Was Abraham's response to God's call a perfect one? Was his obedience flawless? Ah, dear reader, is it difficult to anticipate the answer? There has been only one perfect life lived on this earth. Moreover, had there been no failure in Abraham's walk, would not the type have been faulty? But God's types are accurate at every point, and in His Word the Spirit has portrayed the characters of His people in the colors of truth and reality: He has faithfully described them as they actually were. True, a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham, but the "flesh" had not been removed from him. True, a supernatural faith had been communicated to him, but the root of unbelief had not been taken out of him. Two contrary principles were at work within Abraham (as they are in us), and both of these were evidenced.

God's requirements from Abraham were clearly made known: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1). The first response which he made to this is recorded in Genesis

11:31, "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." He left Chaldea, but instead of separating from his "kindred," he suffered his nephew Lot to accompany him; instead of forsaking his father's house, Terah was permitted to take the lead; and instead of entering Canaan, Abraham stopped short and settled in Haran. Abraham temporized: his obedience was partial, faltering, tardy. He yielded to the affections of the flesh. Alas, cannot both writer and reader see here a plain reflection of himself, a portrayal of his own sad failures! Yes, "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19).

But let us earnestly seek grace at this point to be much upon our guard lest we "wrest" (2 Pet. 3:16) to our own hurt what has just been before us. If the thought arises "O well, Abraham was not perfect, he did not always do as God commanded him, so it cannot be expected that I should do any better than he did," then recognize that this is a temptation from the Devil. Abraham's failures are not recorded for us to shelter behind, for us to make them so many palliations for our own sinful falls; no, rather are they to be regarded as so many warnings for us to take to heart and prayerfully heed. Such warnings only leave us the more without excuse. And when we discover that we have sadly repeated the backslidings of the O.T. saints, that very discovery should but humble us the more before God, move to a deeper repentance, lead to increasing self-distrust, and issue in a more earnest and constant seeking of Divine Grace to uphold and maintain us in the paths of righteousness.

Though Abraham failed, there was no failure in God. Blessed indeed is it to behold His long-suffering, His super-abounding grace, His unchanging faithfulness, and the eventual fulfilling of His own purpose. This reveals to us, for the joy of our hearts and the worshipping praise of our souls, another reason why the Holy Spirit has so faithfully placed on record the shadows as well as the lights in the lives of the O.T. saints: they are to serve not only as solemn warnings for us to heed, but also as so many examples of that marvelous patience of God that bears so long and so tenderly with the dullness and waywardness of His children; examples too of that infinite mercy which deals with His people not after their sins, nor

rewards them according to their iniquities. O how the realization of this should melt our hearts, and evoke true worship and thanksgiving unto "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10). It will be so, it must be so, in every truly regenerate soul; though the unregenerate will only turn the very grace of God "into lasciviousness" (Jude 4) unto their eternal undoing.

The sequel to Genesis 11:31 is found in Hebrews 12:5, "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came." Though Abraham had settled down in Haran, God would not allow him to continue there indefinitely. The Lord had purposed that he should enter Canaan, and no purpose of His can fail. God therefore tumbled him out of the nest which he had made for himself (Deut. 32:11), and very solemn is it to observe the means which he used: "And Terah died in Haran (Gen. 11:32 and cf. Acts 7:4)—death had to come in before Abraham left Halfway House! He never started across the wilderness until death severed that tie of the flesh which had held him back. But that with which we desire to be specially occupied at this point is the wondrous love of God toward His erring child.

"I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). Blessed, thrice blessed, is this. Though the dogs are likely to consume it unto their own ruin, yet that must not make us withhold this sweet portion of "the children's bread." The immutability of the Divine nature is the saints' indemnity; God's unchangeableness affords the fullest assurance of His faithfulness in the promises. No change in us can alter His mind, no unfaithfulness on our part will cause Him to revoke His word. Unstable though we be, sorely tempted as we often are, tripped up as may frequently be our case, yet God "shall also confirm us unto the end... God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:8, 9). The powers of Satan and the world are against us, suffering and death before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us; yet God will "confirm us unto the end." He did Abraham; He will us. Hallelujah.

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (verse 9). This verse brings before us the second effect or proof of Abraham's faith. In the previous verse the

apostle had spoken of the place from whence Abraham was called, here of the place to which he was called. There he had shown the power of faith in self-denial in obedience to God's command, here we behold the patience and constancy of faith in waiting for the fulfillment of the promise. But the mere reading of this verse by itself is not likely to make much impression upon us: we need to diligently consult and carefully ponder other passages, in order to be in a position to appreciate its real force.

First of all we are told, "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land." Unless a supernatural work of grace had been wrought in Abraham's heart, subduing (though not eradicating) his natural desires and reasonings, he certainly would not have remained in Canaan. An idolatrous people were already occupying the land. Again, we are told that "He (God) gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5). Only the unclaimed tracts, which were commonly utilized by those having flocks and herds, were available for his use. Not an acre did he own, for he had to "purchase" a plot of ground as a burying place for his dead (Gen. 23). What a trial of faith was this, for Hebrews 11:8 expressly declares that he was afterward to "receive" that land "for an inheritance." Yet instead of this presenting a difficulty, it only enhances the beauty and accuracy of the type.

The Christian has also been begotten "to an inheritance" (1 Pet. 1:4), but he does not fully enter into it the moment he is called from death unto life. No, instead, he is left here (very often) for many years to fight his way through an hostile world and against an opposing Devil. During that fight he meets with many discouragements and receives numerous wounds. Hard duties have to be performed, difficulties overcome, and trials endured, before the Christian enters fully into that inheritance unto which Divine grace has appointed him. And naught but a Divinely bestowed and Divinely maintained faith is sufficient for these things: that alone will sustain the heart in the face of losses, reproaches, painful delays. It was thus with Abraham: it was "by faith" he left the land of his birth, started out on a journey he knew not whither, crossed a dreary wilderness, and then sojourned in tents for more than half a century in a strange land. Rightly did the Puritan Manton say:

"From God's training up Abraham in a course of difficulties, we see it is no easy matter to go to Heaven; there is a great deal of ado to unsettle a believer from the world, and there is a great deal of ado to fix the heart in the expectation of Heaven. First there must be self-denial in coming out of the world, and divorcing ourselves from our bosom sins and dearest interests; and then there must be patience shown in waiting for God's mercy to eternal life, waiting His leisure as well as performing His will. Here is the time of our exercise, and we must expect it, since the father of the faithful was thus trained up ere he could inherit the promises."

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country." The force of this will be more apparent if we link together two statements in Genesis: "And the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12:6) "And the Lord said, unto Abram . . . all the land which thou seest to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever" (Gen. 13:14, 15). Here was the ground which Abraham's faith rested upon, the plain word of Him that cannot lie. Upon that promise his heart reposed, and therefore he was occupied not with the Canaanites who were then in the land, but with the invisible Jehovah who had pledged it unto him. How different was the case of the spies, who, in a later day, went up into this very land, with the assurance of the Lord that it was a "good land." Their report was "the land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Num. 13:32, 33).

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country." As it was by faith that Abraham went out of Chaldea, so it was by faith he remained out of the country of which he was originally a native. This illustrates the fact that not only do we become Christians by an act of faith (the yielding up of the whole man unto God), but that as Christians we are called upon to live by faith (Gal. 2:20), to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). The place where Abraham now abode is here styled "the land of promise," rather than Canaan, to teach us that it is God's promise which puts vigor into faith. Note how both Moses and Joshua, at a later day, sought to quicken the faith of the Israelites by this means: "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do, that it may be well with

thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee" (Deut. 6:3).

"And the Lord your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord your God hath promised you" (Josh. 23:5). "As in a strange country." This tells us how Abraham regarded that land which was then occupied by the Canaanites, and how he conducted himself in it. He purchased no farm, built no house, and entered into no alliance with its people. True, he entered into a league of peace and amity with Aner, Eshcol, and Mature (Gen. 14:13), but it was as a stranger, and not as one who had any thing of his own in the land. He reckoned that country no more his own, than any other land in the world. He took no part in its politics, had nothing to do with its religion, had very little social intercourse with its people, but lived by faith and found his joy and satisfaction in communion with the Lord. This teaches us that though the Christian is still in the world, he is not of it, nor must he cultivate its friendship (James 4:4). He may use it as necessity requires, but he must ever be on his prayerful guard against abusing it (1 Cor. 7:31).

"Dwelling in tents." These words inform us both of Abraham's manner of life and disposition of heart during his sojourning in Canaan. Let us consider them from this twofold viewpoint. Abraham did not conduct himself as the possessor of Canaan, but as a foreigner and pilgrim in it. To Heth he confessed, "I am a stranger and sojourner with you" (Gen. 23:4). As the father of the faithful he set an example of self-denial and patience. It was not that he was unable to purchase an estate, build an elaborate mansion, and settle down in some attractive spot, for Genesis 13:2 tells us that "Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold"; but God had not called him unto this. Ah, my reader, a palace without the enjoyed presence of the Lord, is but an empty bauble; whereas a prison-dungeon occupied by one in real communion with Him, may be the very vestibule of Heaven.

Living in a strange country, surrounded by wicked heathen, had it not been wiser for Abraham to erect a strongly fortified castle? A "tent" offers little or no defense against attack. Ah, but "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." And Abraham both feared and trusted God. "Where faith enables men to live unto God, as unto their eternal

concerns, it will enable them to trust unto Him in all the difficulties, dangers, and hazards of this life. To pretend a trust in God as unto our souls and invisible things, and not resign our temporal concerns with patience and quietness unto His disposal, is a vain pretense. And we may take hence an eminent trial of our faith. Too many deceive themselves with a presumption of faith in the promises of God, as unto things future and eternal. They suppose that they do so believe, as that they shall be eternally saved, but if they are brought into any trial, as unto things temporal, wherein they are concerned, they know not what belongs unto the life of faith, nor how to trust God in a due manner. It was not so with Abraham: his faith acted itself uniformly with respect to the providences, as well as the promises of God" (John Owen).

Abram's "dwelling in tents" also denoted the disposition of his heart. A life of faith is one which has respect unto things spiritual and eternal, and therefore one of its fruits is to be contented with a very small portion of earthly things. Faith not only begets a confidence and joy in the things promised, but it also works a composure of spirit and submission to the Lord's will. A little would serve Abraham on earth because he expected so much in Heaven. Nothing is more calculated to deliver the heart from covetousness, from lusting after the perishing things of time and sense, from envying the poor rich, than to heed that exhortation, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). But it is one thing to quote that verse, and another to put it into practice. If we are the children of Abraham, we must emulate the example of Abraham. Are our carnal affections mortified? Can we submit to a pilgrim's fare without murmuring? Are we enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:3)?

The tent-life of the patriarchs demonstrated their pilgrim character: it made manifest their contentment to live upon the surface of the earth, for a tent has no foundation, and can be pitched or struck at short notice. They were sojourners here and just passing through this wilderness-scene without striking their roots into it. Their tent life spoke of their separation from the world's allurements, politics, friendships, religion. It is deeply significant to note that when reference is made to Abraham's "tent," there is mention also of his "altar": "and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and Hai on the east, and there he builded an altar unto the

Lord" (Gen. 12:8); "and he went on his journeys... unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the place of the altar" (Gen. 13:3,4); "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mature, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord" (Gen. 13:18). Observe carefully the order in each of these passages: there must be heart separation from the world before a thrice holy God can be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

"Dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." The Greek here is more expressive than our translation: "in tents dwelling": the Holy Spirit emphasized first the act of dwelling, but the fact that this dwelling was in tents. The mention of Isaac and Jacob in this verse is for the purpose of calling our attention unto the further fact that Abraham continued thus for the space of almost a century, Jacob not being born until he had sojourned in Canaan for eighty-five years! Herein we are taught that "when we are once engaged and have given up ourselves to God in a way of believing, there must be no choice, no dividing or halting, no halving; but we must follow Him fully, wholly, living by faith in all things" (John Owen), and that unto the very end of our earthly course.

There does not seem to be anything requiring us to believe that Isaac and Jacob shared Abraham's tent, rather is the thought that they also lived the same pilgrim's life in Canaan: as Abraham was a sojourner in that land, without any possession there, so were they. The "with" may be extended to cover all that is said in the previous part of the verse, indicating it was "by faith" that both Abraham's son and grandson followed the example set them. The words which follow confirm this: they were "the heirs with him of the same promise." That is indeed a striking expression, for ordinarily sons are merely "heirs" and not joint-heirs with their parents. This is to show us that Isaac was not indebted to Abraham for the promise, nor Jacob to Isaac, each receiving the same promise direct from God. This is clear from a comparison of Genesis 13:15 and Genesis 17:8 with Genesis 26:3 and Genesis 28:13, 35:12. It also tells us that if we are to have an interest in the blessings of Abraham, we must walk in the steps of his faith.

Very blessed and yet very searching is the principle exemplified in the last clause of verse 9. God's saints are all of the same spiritual disposition. They are members of the same family,

united to the same Christ, indwelt by the same Spirit. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32). They are governed by the same laws: "I will put My laws into their mind and write them in their hearts" (Heb. 8:10). They all have one aim, to please God and glorify Him on earth. They are called to the same privileges: "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us" etc. (2 Pet. 1:1).

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" (verse 10). Ah, here is the explanation of what has been before us in the previous verse, as the opening "for" intimates; Abraham was walking by faith, and not by sight, and therefore his heart was set upon things above and not upon things below. It is the exercise of faith and hope upon heavenly objects which makes us carry ourselves with a loose heart toward worldly comforts. Abraham realized that his portion and possession was not on earth, but in Heaven. It was this which made him content to dwell in tents. He did not build a city, as Cain did (Gen. 4:17), but "looked for" one of which God Himself is the Maker. What an illustration and exemplification was this of the opening verse of our chapter: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

That for which Abraham looked was Heaven itself, here likened unto a city with foundations, in manifest antithesis from the "tents" which have no foundations. Various figures are used to express the saints' everlasting portion. It is called an "inheritance" (1 Pet. 1:4), to signify the freeness of its tenure. It is denominated "many mansions" in the Father's House. It is styled an "heavenly country" (Heb. 11:16) to signify its spaciousness. There are various resemblances between Heaven and a "city." A city is a civil society that is under government: so in Heaven there is a society of angels and saints ruled by God: Hebrews 12:22-24. In Bible days a city was a place of safety, being surrounded by strong and high walls: so in Heaven we shall be eternally secure from sin and Satan, death and every enemy. A city is well stocked with provisions: so in Heaven nothing will be lacking which is good and blessed. The "foundations" of the Heavenly City are the eternal decree and love of God, the unalterable covenant of grace, Christ Jesus the Rock of Ages, on which it stands firm and immovable.

It is the power of a faith which is active and operative that

will sustain the heart under hardships and sufferings as nothing else will. "For which cause we faint not: but though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). As John Owen well said, "This is a full description of Abraham's faith, in the operation and effect here ascribed to it by the apostle. And herein it is exemplary and encouraging to all believers under their present trials and sufferings."

Ah, my brethren and sisters, do we not see from that which has been before us why the attractions of the world or the depressing effects of suffering, have such a power upon us? Is it not because we are negligent in the stirring up of our faith to "lay hold of the hope which is set before us"? If we meditated more frequently upon the glory and bliss of Heaven, and were favored with foretastes of it in our souls, would we not sigh after it more ardently and press forward unto it more earnestly? "Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56); and if we had more serious and spiritual thoughts of the Day to come, we would not be so sad as we often are. "He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3), for it lifts the heart above this scene and carries us in spirit within the veil. The more our hearts are attracted to Heaven, the less will the poor things of this world appeal to us.

Hebrews 11:11, 12

Chapter 62 - The Faith of Sarah

In the verses which are now to be before us the apostle calls attention to the marvelous power of a God-given faith to exercise itself in the presence of most discouraging circumstances, persevere in the face of the most formidable obstacles, and trust God to do that which unto human reason seemed utterly impossible. They show us that this faith was exercised by a frail and aged woman, who at first was hindered and opposed by the workings of unbelief, but who in the end relied upon the veracity of God and rested upon His promise. They show what an intensely practical thing faith is: that it not only lifts up the soul to Heaven, but is able to draw down strength for the body on earth. They demonstrate what great endings sometimes issue from small beginnings, and that like a stone thrown into a lake produces ever-enlarging circles on the rippling waters, so faith issues in fruit which increases from generation to generation.

The more the 11th verse of our present chapter be pondered, the more evident will it appear the faith there spoken of is of a radically different order from that mental and theoretical faith of cozy-chair dreamers. The "faith" of the vast majority of professing Christians is as different from that described in Hebrews 11 as darkness is from light. The one ends in talk, the other was expressed in deeds. The one breaks down when put to the test, the other survived every trial to which it was exposed. The one is inoperative and ineffectual, the other was active and powerful. The one is unproductive, the other issued in fruits to the glory of God. Ah, is it not evident that the great difference between them is, that one is merely human, the other Divine; one merely natural, the other altogether supernatural? This it is which our hearts and consciences need to lay hold of and turn into earnest prayer.

That which has just been pointed out ought to deeply exercise both writer and reader. It ought to search us through and through, causing us to seriously and diligently weigh the character of our "faith." It is of little use to be entertained by interesting

articles, unless they lead to careful self-examination. It is of little profit to be made to wonder at the achievements of the faith of those O.T. saints, unless we are shamed by them, and made to cry mightily unto God for Him to work in us a "like precious faith." Unless our faith issues in works which mere nature cannot produce, unless it is enabling us to "overcome the world" (1 John 5:4) and triumph over the lusts of the flesh, then we have grave cause to fear that our faith is not "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1). Cry with David, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Ps. 26:2).

It is not that any Christian lives a life of perfect faith—only the Lord Jesus ever did that. No, for in the first place, like all the other spiritual graces, it is subject to growth (2 Thess. 1:3), and full maturity is not reached in this life. In the second place, faith is not always in exercise, nor can we command its activities: He who bestowed it, must also renew it. In the third place, the faith of every saint falters at times: it did in Abraham, in Moses, in Elijah, in the apostles. The flesh is still in us, and therefore the reasonings of unbelief are ever ready (unless Divine grace subdue them) to oppose the actings of faith. We are not then urging the reader to search in himself for a faith that is perfect, either in its growth, its constancy or its achievements. Rather are we to seek Divine aid and make sure whether we have any faith which is superior to what has been acquired through religious education; whether we have a faith which, despite the strugglings of unbelief, does trust the living God; whether we have a faith which produces any fruit which manifestly issues from a spiritual root.

Having spoken of Abraham's faith, the apostle now makes mention of Sarah's. "Observe what a blessing it is when a husband and wife are both partners of faith, when both in the same yoke draw one way. Abraham is the father of the faithful, and Sarah is recommended among believers as having a fellowship in the same promises, and in the same troubles and trials. So it is said of Zachariah and Elizabeth, 'And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless' (Luke 1:6). It is a mighty encouragement when the constant companion of our lives is also a fellow in the same faith. This should direct us in the matter of choice: she cannot be a meet help that goeth a contrary way in religion. Religion decayeth in

families by nothing so much as by want of care in matches" (T. Manton).

"Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (verse 11). There are five things upon which our attention needs to be focused. First, the impediments of her faith: these were, her barrenness, old age, and unbelief. Second, the effect of her faith: she "received strength to conceive." Third, the constancy of her faith: she trusted God unto an actual deliverance or birth of the child. Fourth, the foundation of her faith: she rested upon the veracity of the Divine Promiser. Fifth, the fruit of her faith: the numerous posterity which issued from her son Isaac. Let us consider each of these separately.

"Through faith also Sarah herself." The Greek is just the same here as in all the other verses, and should have been rendered uniformly "By faith" etc. The word "also" seems to be added for a double purpose. First to counteract and correct any error which might suppose that women were debarred the blessings and privileges of grace. It is true that in the official sphere God has prohibited them from occupying the place of rule or usurping authority over the men, so that they are commanded to be silent in the churches (1 Cor. 14:34), are not permitted to teach (1 Tim. 2:12), and are bidden to be in subjection to their husbands (Eph. 5:22). But in the spiritual sphere all inequalities disappear, for "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), and therefore the believing husband and the believing wife are "heirs together of the grace of life."

In the second place, this added "also" informs us that, though a woman, Sarah exercised the same faith as had Abraham. She had left Chaldea when he did, accompanied him to Canaan, dwelt with him in tents. Not only so, but she personally acted faith upon the living God. Necessarily so, for she was equally concerned in the Divine revelation with Abraham, and was as much a party to the great difficulties of its accomplishment. The blessing of the promised seed was assigned to and appropriated by her, as much as to and by him; and therefore is she proposed unto the Church as an example (1 Pet. 3:5, 6). "As Abraham was the father of the faithful, or of the church, so she was the mother of it, so as that the distinct

mention of her faith was necessary. She was the free woman from whence the Church sprang: Galatians 4:22, 23. And all believing women are her daughters: 1 Peter 3:6" (John Owen).

"By faith also Sarah herself received strength." The word "herself" is emphatic: it was not her husband only, by whose faith she might receive the blessing, but by her own faith that she received strength, and this, notwithstanding the very real and formidable obstacles which stood in the way of her exercising it. These, as we have pointed out, were three in number. First, she had not borne any children during the customary years of pregnancy: as Genesis 11:30 informs us, "Sarah was barren"; "Sarah, Abram's wife, bare him no children" (Gen. 16:1). Second, she was long past the age of childbearing, for she was now "ninety years old" (Gen. 17:17). Third, the workings of unbelief interposed, persuading her that it was altogether against nature and reason for a woman, under such circumstances, to give birth unto a child. This comes out in Genesis 18. There we read of three men appearing unto Abraham, one of whom was the Lord in theophanic manifestation. Unto him He said, "Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Upon hearing this "Sarah laughed within herself."

Sarah's laughter was that of doubting and distrust, for she said, "I am waxed old." At once the Lord rebukes her unbelief, asking "Is there anything too hard for the Lord! At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." Solemn indeed is the sequel. "Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And He said, Nay; but thou didst laugh" (verse 15). It is always a shame to do amiss, but a greater shame to deny it. It was a sin to give way to unbelief, but it was adding iniquity unto iniquity to cover it with a lie. But we deceive ourselves if we think to impose upon God, for nothing can be concealed from His all-seeing eye. By comparing Hebrews 11:11 with what is recorded in Genesis 18, we learn that after the Lord had reproved Sarah's unbelief, and she began to realize that the promise came from God, her faith was called into exercise. Because her laughter came from weakness and not from scorn, God smote her not, as He did Zacharias for his unbelief (Luke 1:20).

Varied are the lessons which may be learned from the above incident. Many times the Word does not take effect immediately. It did not in Sarah's case: though afterward she believed, at first she

laughed. It was only when the Divine promise was repeated that her faith began to act. Let preachers and Christian parents, who are discouraged by lack of success, lay this to heart. Again; see here that before faith is established often there is a conflict: "shall I have a child who am old?"—reason opposed the promise. Just as when a fire is kindled the smoke is seen before the flame, so ere the heart rests upon the Word there is generally doubting and fear. Once more; observe how graciously God hides the defects of His children: nothing is said of Rahah's lie (Heb. 11:31), of Job's impatience (James 5:11), nor here of Sarah's laughing, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love" (Eph. 5:1, 2)!

Let us next consider what is here ascribed unto the faith of Sarah: "she received strength to conceive seed." She obtained that which previously was not in her: there was now a restoration of her nature to perform its normal functions. Her dead womb was supernaturally vivified. In response to her faith, the Omnipotent One did for Sarah what He had done to Abraham in response to his trusting of Him: "I have made thee a father of many nations, before Him, whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead" (Rom. 4:17). "All things are possible with God"; yes, and it is also true that "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23): how blessedly and strikingly does the incident now before us illustrate this! O that it may speak unto each of our hearts and cause us to long after and pray for an increase of our faith. What is more glorifying to God than a confident looking unto Him to work in and through us that which mere nature cannot produce.

"By faith also Sarah herself received strength." Christian reader, this is recorded both for thine instruction and encouragement. Faith worked a vigor in Sarah's body where it was not before. Is it not written "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31)? Do we really believe this? Do we act as though we did? The writer can bear witness to the veracity of that promise. When he was in Australia, editing this Magazine, keeping up with a heavy correspondence, and preaching five and six times each week, when it was over one hundred in the shade, many a time has he dragged his weary body into the pulpit, and then looked unto the Lord for a definite reinvigoration of body. Never did He fail us. After speaking for two hours we generally felt fresher than we did when we arose at the beginning of the day. And why not? Has not

God promised to "supply all our need"? Of how many is it true that "they have not, because they (in faith) ask not" (James 4:2).

Ah, dear reader, "Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8): "profitable" for the body, as well as for the soul. While we strongly reprobate much that is now going on under the name of "Faith-Healing," yet we have as little patience with the pretended hyper-sanctity which disdains any looking unto God for the supply of our bodily needs. In this same chapter which we are now commenting upon, we read of others who "out of weakness were made strong" (verse 34). Sad it is to see so many of God's dear children living far beneath their privileges. True, many are under the chastening hand of God. But this should not be so: the cause should be sought, the wrong righted, the sin confessed, restoration both spiritual and temporal diligently sought.

We do not wish to convey the impression that the only application unto us of these words, "By faith also Sarah herself received strength," has reference to the reviving of the physical body: not so, though that is, undoubtedly, the first lesson to be learned. But there is a higher signification too. Many a Christian feels his spiritual weakness: that is well, yet instead of this hindering, it should bestir to lay hold of the Lord's strength (Isa. 27:5). In the final analysis, it is nothing but lack of faith which so often allows the "flesh" to hinder us from bringing forth the Gospel-fruits of holiness. Despair not of personal frailty, but go forward in the strength of God: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10): turn this into believing prayer for Divine enablement. "Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase" (Job 8:7).

Does the reader still say, "Ah, but such an experience is not for me; alas, I am so unworthy, so helpless; I feel so lifeless and listless." So was Sarah! Yet, "by faith" she "received strength." And, dear friend, faith is not occupied with self, but with God. "Abraham considered not his own body" (Rom. 4:19), nor did Sarah. Each of them looked away from self, and counted upon God to work a miracle. And God did not fail them: He is pledged to honor those who honor Him, and nothing honors Him more than a trustful expectation. He always responds to faith. There is no reason why

you should remain weak and listless. True, without Christ you can do nothing; but there is an infinite fullness in Him (John 1:16) for you to draw from. Then from this day onwards, let your attitude be "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Apply to Him, count upon Him: "my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1).

"And was delivered of a child." The "and" here connects what follows with each of the preceding verbs. It was "by faith" that Sarah "received strength," and it was also "by faith" that she was now "delivered of a child." It is the constancy and perseverance of her faith which is here intimated. There was no abortion, no miscarriage; she trusted God right through unto the end. This brings before us a subject upon which very little is written these days: the duty and privilege of Christian women counting upon God for a safe issue in the most trying and critical season in their lives. Faith is to be exercised not only in acts of worship, but in the ordinary offices of our daily affairs. We are to eat and drink in faith, work and sleep in faith; and the Christian wife should be delivered of her child by faith. The danger is great, and if in any extremity there is need of faith, much more so where life itself is involved. Let us seek to condense from the helpful comments of the Puritan Manton.

First, we must be sensible what need we have to exercise faith in this case, that we may not run upon danger blindfold; and if we escape, then to think our deliverance a mere chance. Rachel died in this case; so also did the wife of Phineas (1 Sam. 4:19, 20): a great hazard is run, and therefore you must be sensible of it. The more difficulty and danger be apprehended, the better the opportunity for the exercise of faith: 2 Chronicles 20:12, 2 Corinthians 1:9. Second, because the sorrows of travail are a monument of God's displeasure against sin (Gen. 3:16), therefore this must put you the more earnestly to seek an interest in Christ, that you may have remedy against sin. Third, meditate upon the promise of 1 Timothy 2:15, which is made good eternally or temporally as God sees fit. Fourth, the faith you exercise must be the glorifying of His power and submitting to His will. This expresses the kind of faith which is proper to all temporal mercies: Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst save me—it is sufficient to ease the heart of a great deal of trouble and perplexing fear.

"And was delivered of a child." As we have pointed out in

the last paragraph, this clause is added to show the continuance of Sarah's faith and the blessing of God upon her. True faith not only appropriates His promise, but continues resting on the same till that which is believed be actually accomplished. The principle of this is enunciated in Hebrews 3:14 and Hebrews 10:36. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end"; "Cast not away therefore your confidence." It is at this point so many fail. They endeavor to lay hold of a Divine promise, but in the interval of testing let go of it. This is why Christ said, "If ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this" etc. Matthew 21:21—"doubt not," not only at the moment of pleading the promise, but during the time you are awaiting its fulfillment. Hence also, unto "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart" is added "and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

"When she was past age." This clause is added so as to heighten the miracle which God so graciously wrought in response to Sarah's faith. It magnifies the glory of His power. It is recorded for our encouragement. It shows us that no difficulty or hindrance should cause a disbelief of the promise. God is not tied down to the order of nature, nor limited by any secondary causes. He will turn nature upside down rather than not be as good as His word. He has brought water out of a rock, made iron to float (2 Kings 6:6), sustained two million people in a howling wilderness. These things should arouse the Christian to wait upon God with full confidence in the face of the utmost emergency. Yea, the greater the impediments which confront us, faith should be increased. The trustful heart says, Here is a fit occasion for faith; now that all creature-streams have run dry is a grand opportunity for counting on God to show Himself strong on my behalf. What cannot He do! He made a woman of ninety to bear a child—a thing quite contrary to nature—so I may surely expect Him to work wonders for me too.

"Because she judged Him faithful who had promised." Here is the secret of the whole thing. Here was the ground of Sarah's confidence, the foundation on which faith rested. She did not look at God's promises through the mist of interposing obstacles, but she viewed the difficulties and hindrances through the clear light of God's promises. The act which is here ascribed unto Sarah is, that she "judged" or reckoned, reputed and esteemed, God to be faithful: she was assured that He would make good His word, on which He

had caused her to hope. God had spoken: Sarah had heard; in spite of all that seemed to make it impossible that the promise should be fulfilled in her case, she steadfastly believed. Rightly did Luther say, "If you would trust God, you must learn to crucify the question How." "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do" (1 Thess. 5:24): this is sufficient for the heart to rest upon; faith will cheerfully leave it with Omniscience as to how the promise will be made good to us.

"Because she judged Him faithful who had promised." Let it be carefully noted that Sarah's faith went beyond the promise. While her mind dwelt upon the thing promised, it seemed unto her altogether incredible, but when she took her thoughts off all secondary causes and fixed them on God Himself, then the difficulties no longer disturbed her: her heart was at rest in God. She knew that God could be depended upon: He is "faithful"—able, willing, sure to perform His word. Sarah looked beyond the promise to the Promiser, and as she did so all doubting was stilled. She rested with full confidence on the immutability of Him that cannot lie, knowing that where Divine veracity is engaged, omnipotence will make it good. It is by believing meditations upon the character of God that faith is fed and strengthened to expect the blessing, despite all apparent difficulties and supposed impossibilities. It is the heart's contemplation of the perfections of God which causes faith to prevail. As this is of such vital practical importance, let us devote another paragraph to enlarging thereon.

To fix our minds on the things promised, to have an assured expectation of the enjoyment of them, without the heart first resting upon the veracity, immutability, and omnipotency of God, is but a deceiving imagination. Rightly did John Owen point out that, "The formal object of faith in the Divine promises, is not the things promised in the first place, but God Himself in His essential excellencies, of truth, or faithfulness and power." Nevertheless, the Divine perfections do not, of themselves, work faith in us: it is only as the heart believingly ponders the Divine attributes that we shall "judge" or conclude Him faithful that has promised. It is the man whose mind is stayed upon God Himself, who is kept in "perfect peace" (Isa. 26:3): that is, he who joyfully contemplates who and what God is that will be preserved from doubting and wavering while waiting the fulfillment of the promise. As it was with Sarah,

so it is with us: every promise of God has tacitly annexed to it this consideration, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord!"

"Wherefore also from one were born, and that too of (one) having become dead, even as the stars of the heaven in multitude, and as the sand which (is) by the shore of the sea the countless"

(verse 12). We have quoted the rendering given in the Bagster Interlinear because it is more literal and accurate than our A.V. The "him" in the English translation is misleading, for in this verse there is no masculine pronoun: at the most the "one" must refer to one couple, but personally we believe it points to one woman, Sarah, as the "born" (rather than "begotten") intimates. We regard this 12th verse as setting forth the fruit of her faith, namely the numerous posterity which issued from her son, Isaac. The double reference to the "sand" and the "stars" calls attention to the twofold seed: the earthly and the heavenly, the natural and the spiritual Israel.

Like the "great multitude which no man could number" of Revelation 7:9, so "as the stars of the sky for multitude and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable" of our present verse, is obviously an hyperbole: it is figurative language, and not to be understood literally. This may seem a bold and unwarrantable statement to some of our readers, yet if scripture be compared with scripture, no other conclusion is possible. The following passages make this clear: Deuteronomy 1:10, Joshua 11:4, Judges 7:12, 1 Samuel 13:5, 2 Samuel 17:11, 1 Kings 4:20. For other examples of this figure of speech see Deuteronomy 9:1, Psalm 78:27, Isaiah 60:22, John 21:25. Hyperboles are employed not to move us to believe untruths, but, by emphasis, arrest our attention and cause us to heed weighty matters. The following rules are to be observed in the employment of them. First, they are to be used only of such things as are indeed true in the substance of them. Second, only of things which are worthy of more than ordinary consideration. Third, set out, as nearly as possible, in proverbial language. Fourth, expressed in words of similarity and dissimilarity, rather than by words of equality and inequality (W. Gouge).

But let our final thought be upon the rich recompense whereby God rewarded the faith of Sarah. The opening "Therefore" of verse 12 points the blessed consequence of her relying upon the faithfulness of God in the face of the utmost natural

discouragements. From her faith there issued Isaac, and from him, ultimately, Christ Himself. And this is recorded for our instruction. Who can estimate the fruits of faith? Who can tell how many lives may be affected for good, even in generations yet to come, through your faith and my faith today! Oh how the thought of this should stir us up to cry more earnestly "Lord, increase our faith" to the praise of the glory of Thy grace: Amen.

Hebrews 11:13, 14

Chapter 63 - The Perseverance of Faith

Having described some of the eminent acts of faith put forth by the earliest members of God's family, the apostle now pauses to insert a general commendation of the faith of those he had already named, and (as is dear from verses 39, 40) of others yet to follow. This commendation is set forth in verse 13 and is amplified in the next three verses. The evident design of the Holy Spirit in this was to press upon the Hebrews, and upon us, the imperative need of such a faith as would last, wear, overcome obstacles, and endure unto the end. Even the natural man is capable of "making good resolutions" and has flashes of endeavour to please God, but he is entirely lacking in that principle which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

The faith of God's elect is like unto its Divine Author in these respects: it is living, incorruptible, and cannot be conquered by the Devil. Being implanted by God, the gift and grace of faith can never be lost. Strikingly was this illustrated in the history of the patriarchs. Called upon to leave the land of their birth, to sojourn in a country filled with idolaters, owning no portion of it, dwelling in tents, suffering many hardships and trials, and living without any such peculiar temporal advantages as might answer to the singular favor which the Lord declared He bore to them; nevertheless they all died in faith. The eye of their hearts saw clearly the blessings God had promised, and persuaded that they would be theirs in due season, they joyfully anticipated their future portion and gave up present advantages for the sake thereof.

In the verses which are to be before us the apostle, then, stresses the great importance of seeking and possessing a persevering faith, therefore does he make mention of the fact that as long as they remained in this world, the O.T. saints were believers in the promises of God. It is the durability and constancy of their faith which is commended. Despite all the workings of unbelief within (records of which are found in Genesis in the cases of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob) and all the assaults of temptation from without, they persisted in clinging to God and His Word. They lived by faith, and they died in faith: therefore have they left us an example that we should follow their steps. Beautifully did John Calvin point out:

"There is expressed here a difference between us and the fathers: though God gave to the fathers only a taste of that grace which is largely poured on us, though He showed to them at a distance only an obscure representation of Christ, who is now set forth to us clearly before our eyes, yet they were satisfied and never fell away from their faith: how much greater reason then have we at this day to persevere! If we grow faint, we are doubly inexcusable. It is then an enhancing circumstance, that the fathers had a distant view of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, while we at this day have so near view of it, and that they hailed the promises afar off, while we have them as it were quite near us, for if they nevertheless persevered even unto death, what sloth will it be to become wearied in faith, when the Lord sustains us by so many helps. Were any one to object and say, that they could not have believed without receiving the promises on which faith is necessarily founded: to this the answer is, that the expression is to be understood comparatively; for they were far from that high position to which God has raised us. Hence it is that though they had the same salvation promised them, yet they had not the promises so clearly revealed to them as they are to us under the kingdom of Christ: but they were content to behold them afar off."

"These all died in faith" (verse 13), or, more literally, "In (or "according to") faith died these all." Differing from most of the commentators, we believe those words take in the persons mentioned previously, from Abel onwards: "these all" grammatically include those who precede as well as those which follow—the relative pronoun embracing all those set forth in the catalogue, namely, young and old, male and female, great and small. "The same Spirit works in all, and shows forth His power in all, 2 Corinthians 4:13" (W. Gouge). Against this it may be objected that Enoch died not. True but the apostle is referring only to those that died, just as Genesis 46:7 must be understood as excepting Joseph who was already in Egypt. Moreover, though Enoch died not as the others, he was removed from earth to heaven, and before his translation he continued living by faith unto the very end, which is the main thing

here intended.

"In (or "according to") faith died all these." The faith in which they died is the same as that described in the first verse of our chapter, namely, a justifying and sanctifying faith. That they "died in faith" does not necessarily mean that their faith was actually in exercise during the hour of death, but more strictly, that they never apostatised from the faith: though they actually obtained or possessed not that which was the object of their faith, nevertheless, unto the end of their earthly pilgrimage they confidently looked forward unto the same. Five effects or workings of their faith are here mentioned, each of which we must carefully ponder. First, they "received not the promises." Second, but they saw them "afar off." Third, they were "persuaded of them." Fourth, they "embraced" them. Fifth, in consequence thereof they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

As we shall see (D.V.) when taking up later verses, some of the O.T. saints died in the actual exercise of faith. To die in faith is to have an assured confidence in an estate of glory and bliss. "And hereunto is required: 1. The firm belief of a substantial existence after this life; without this, all faith and hope must perish in death. 2. A resignation and trust of their departing souls into the care and power of God. 3. The belief in a future state of blessedness and rest, here called an heavenly country, a city prepared for them by God. 4. Faith of the resurrection of their bodies after death, and that their entire persons, which had undergone the pilgrimage of this life, might be instated in eternal rest" (John Owen).

Thousands who are now in their graves were taught that it was wrong to expect death and make suitable preparation for it. They were told that the return of Christ was so near, He would certainly come during their lifetime. Alas, the writer has, in measure, been guilty of the same thing. True, it is both the Christian's happy privilege and bounden duty to be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13), for this is the grand prospect which God hath set before His people in all ages; but He has nowhere told us when His Son shall descend; He may do so today, He may not for hundreds of years. But to say that "looking for that blessed hope" makes it wrong to anticipate death is manifestly absurd: the O.T. saints had just as definite promises for the first advent of Christ as the N.T. saints have

for His second, and they thought frequently of death!

It is greatly to be feared that much of the popularity with which the "premillennial and imminent coming of Christ" has been received, may be attributed to a carnal dread of death: a strong appeal is made to the flesh when people can be persuaded that they are likely to escape the grave. That one generation of Christians will do so is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but how many generations have already supposed that theirs was the one which would be raptured to heaven, and how many of them were quite unprepared when death overtook them, only that Day will show. We are well aware that these lines are not likely to meet with a favorable reception from some of our readers, but we are not seeking to please them, but God. Any man who is ready to die is prepared for the Lord's return: as you may very likely die before the second advent, it is only the part of wisdom to make sure you are prepared for death.

And who are they whose souls are prepared for the dissolution of the body? Those who have disarmed death beforehand by plucking out its sting, and this by seeking reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. The hornet is harmless when its sting is extracted; a snake need not be dreaded if its fang and poison have been removed. So it is with death. "The sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:56), and if we have repented of our sins, turned from them with full purpose of heart to serve God, and have sought and obtained forgiveness and healing in the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ, then death cannot harm us--it will but conduct us into the presence of God and everlasting felicity. Who are ready to die? Those who evidence and establish their title to Eternal Life by personal holiness, which is the "first-fruits" of heavenly glory. It is by walking in the light of God's Word that we make it manifest that we are meet for the Inheritance of the saints in Light.

"In (or "according to") faith died all these." To die in faith we must live by faith. And for this there must be, first, diligent labor to obtain a knowledge of Divine things. The understanding must be instructed before the path of duty can be known. "Teach me Thy way," "Order my steps in Thy Word," must be our daily prayer. Second, the hiding of God's Word in our hearts. Its precepts must be meditated upon, memorized, and made conscious of: only then will our affections and lives be conformed to them. God's Word is

designed to be not only a light to our understanding, but also a lamp upon our path: our walk is to be guided by it. Third, the regular contemplation of Christ by the soul: a worshipful and adoring consideration of His fathomless love, His marvelous grace, His infinite compassion, His present intercession. This will deliver from a legal spirit, warm the heart, supply strength for duty, and make us want to please Him.

"In faith died all these, not having received the promises." The word "promises" is a metonymy, for the things promised. Literally they had "received the promises," for that which they had heard from God was the basis of their faith: this is clear from verses 10, 14, 16. The things promised concerned the spiritual blessings of the Gospel dispensation and the future heavenly inheritance. The promises made to the fathers and "elders" had respect unto Christ the blessed "Seed" and to Heaven of which Canaan was the type. Observe that this first clause of verse 13 plainly intimates that the same promises were given—though the outer shell of them varied—to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, as were afterwards repeated to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Each one died in the firm expectation of the promised Messiah, and in believing views of the heavenly glory. So to die, was comfortable to themselves, and confirming to others the reality of what they professed.

"Not having received the promises." The Greek word for "received" signifies the actual participation in and possession of: faith, then, relies upon and rests in that which is not yet ours. A large part of the life of faith consists in laying hold of and enjoying the things promised, before the actual possession of them is obtained. It is by meditating upon and extracting their sweetness that the soul is fed and strengthened. The present spiritual happiness of the Christian consists more in promises and expectant anticipation than an actual possession, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is this which enables us to say, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

"But having seen them afar off." This, because the eyes of their understanding had been Divinely enlightened (Eph. 1:18), and thus they were able to perceive in the promises the wisdom, goodness, and love of God. True, the fulfillment of those promises

would be in the remote future, but the eye of faith is strong and endowed with long-distant vision. Thus it was with Abraham: he "rejoiced to see My day," said Christ, "and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Thus it was with Moses, who "had respect unto the recompense of the reward" and "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:26, 27). Solemn indeed is the contrast presented in 2 Peter 1:9, where we read of those who failed to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, love, and in consequence of an undeveloped Christian character "cannot see afar off."

"And were persuaded of them." This announces the soul's satisfactory acquiescence in the veracity of God as to the making good of His Word. It was the setting to of their seal that He is true (John 3:33), which is done when the heart truly receives His testimony. The word "persuaded" means an assured confidence, which is what faith works in the mind. A blessed example of this is seen in the case of Abraham, who, though about an hundred years old and his wife's womb dead, yet when God declared they should have a son, he was "fully persuaded that what He has promised, He was able also to perform" (Rom. 4:21). Ah, my reader, is it not because we are so dilatory in meditating upon the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God, that our hearts are so little persuaded of the verity and value of them!

"And embrace them," not with a cold and formal reception of them, but with a warm and hearty welcome: such is the nature of true faith when it lays hold of the promises of salvation. This is ever the effect of assurance: a thankful and joyful appropriation of the things of God. Faith not only discerns the value of spiritual things, is fully persuaded of their reality, but also loves them. Faith adheres as well as assents: in Scripture faith is expressed by taste as well as sight. Faith "sees" with the understanding, is "persuaded" in the heart, and "embraces" by the will. Thus the order of the verbs in this verse teaches us an important practical lesson. The promises of God are first viewed or contemplated, then rested upon as reliable, and then delighted in. If then we would have livelier affections we must meditate more upon the promises of God: it is the mind which affects the heart.

Ere passing on, let us enquire, Are God's promises really precious unto us? Perhaps we are ready to answer at once, Yes: but

let us test ourselves. Do our hearts cling to them with love and delight? Can we truly say, "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (Ps. 119:14)? What influence do God's promises have upon us in seasons of trial and grief? Do they supply us with more comfort than the dearest things of this world? In the midst of distress and sorrow, do we realize that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17)? What effect do God's promises have upon our praying? Do we plead them before the Throne of Grace? Do we say with David "Remember the word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope" (Ps. 119:49)?

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They who really embrace the promises of God are suitably affected and influenced by them: their delight in heavenly things is manifested by a weanedness from earthly things—as the woman at the well forgot her bucket when Christ was revealed to her soul (John 4:28). When a man truly becomes a Christian he at once begins to view time, and all the objects of time, in a very different light from what he did before. So it was with the patriarchs: their faith had a powerful and transforming effect upon their lives. They made profession of their faith and hope: they made it manifest that their chief interest was neither in nor of the world. They had such a satisfying portion in the promises of God that they publicly renounced such a concern in the world as other men take whose portion is only in this life.

The patriarchs made no secret of the fact that their citizenship and inheritance was elsewhere. Unto the sons of Heth, Abraham confessed "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you" (Gen. 23:4). Unto Pharaoh Jacob said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty" (Gen. 47:9). Nor is this to be explained on the ground that other nations were then in occupation of Canaan: long after Israel entered into possession of that land David cried, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not Thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were" (Ps. 39:12); and again, "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not Thy commandments from me" (Ps. 119:19). So too before all the congregation he owned unto God, "For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our

fathers" (1 Chron. 29:15). Clear proof do these verses furnish that the O.T. saints equally with the New, apprehended their heavenly calling and glory.

"And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." The two terms, though very similar in thought, are not identical. The one refers more to the position, the place taken; the other to condition, how one conducts himself in that place. They were "strangers" because their home was in heaven; "pilgrims," because journeying thither. As another has said, "It is possible to be a 'pilgrim' without being a 'stranger.' But once we realize our true strangership we are perforce compelled to be 'pilgrims.' We may be 'pilgrims', and yet, in our pilgrimage, may visit all the cities and churches in the world, and include them all in our embrace; but if we are true 'sojourners' we shall be 'strangers' to them all, and shall be compelled, as Abraham was, to erect our own solitary altar to Jehovah in the midst of them all. How could Abraham be a worshipper with the Canaanites? Impossible! This is why the 'altar' is so closely connected with the 'tent' in Genesis 12:8 and in Abraham's sojourn" (E.W.B.).

That which was spiritually typified by the outward life of the patriarchs as "strangers and pilgrims" was the Christian's renunciation of the world. As those whose citizenship is in heaven, (Phil. 3:20), we are bidden to be "not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). The patriarchs demonstrated that they were "strangers" by taking no part in the apostate religion, politics, or social life of the Canaanites; and evidenced that they were "pilgrims" by dwelling in tents, moving about from place to place. How far are we making manifest our crucifixion to the world (Gal. 6:14)? Does our daily walk show we are "partakers of the heavenly calling"? Have we ceased looking on this world as our home, and its people as our people? Are we seeking to lay up treasure in heaven, or do we still hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt? When we pray "Lord, conform me to Thine image," do we mean "strip me of all which hinders"!

The figure of the "stranger" applied to the child of God here on earth, is very pertinent and full. The analogies between one who is in a foreign country and the Christian in this world, are marked and numerous. In a strange land one is not appreciated for his birth, but is avoided: John 15:19. The habits, ways, language are strange to him: 1 Peter 4:4. He has to be content with a stranger's fare: 1

Timothy 6:8. He needs to be careful not to give offense to the government: Colossians 4:5. He has to continually enquire his way: Psalm 5:8. Unless he conforms to the ways of that foreign country, he is easily identified: Matthew 26:73. He is often assailed with homesickness, for his heart is not where his body is: Philippians 1:23.

The figure of the "pilgrim" as it applies to the Christian is equally suggestive. Moving on from place to place, he never feels at home. He finds himself very much alone, for he meets with few who are traveling his way. Those he does encounter afford him very little encouragement, for they think him queer. He is very grateful for any kindness shown him: sensible of his dependence on Providence, he is thankful whenever God grants him favor in the eyes of the wicked. He carries nothing with him but what he deems useful for his journey: all superfluities are regarded as encumbrances. He tarries not to gaze upon the various vanities around him. He never thinks of turning back because of the difficulties of the way: he has a definite goal in view, and toward it he steadily presses.

We ought to evidence that we are "strangers and pilgrims" by using the things of this world (when necessity requires), but not abusing them (1 Cor. 7:31). By being contented with that portion of this world's goods which God has assigned us (Phil. 4:11). By conscientiously seeking to discharge our own responsibility, and not being "a busybody in other men's matters" (1 Pet. 4:15). By being moderate and temperate in all things, and thus "abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). By laying aside every hindering weight and mortifying our members which are upon the earth, so that we may run with patience the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1). By daily keeping in mind the brevity and uncertainty of this life (Prov. 27:1). By constantly keeping before the heart our future inheritance, knowing that we shall only be satisfied when we awake in our Lord's likeness.

"If they in spirit amid dark clouds, took a flight into the celestial country, what ought we to do at this day? for Christ stretches forth His hand to us as it were openly, from Heaven, to raise us up to Himself. If the land of Canaan did not engross their attention, how more weaned from things below ought we to be, who have no promised habitation in this world?" (John Calvin). When Basil (a devoted servant of Christ, at the beginning of the "Dark

Ages") was threatened with exile by Modestus, he said, "I know no banishment, who have no abiding-place here in the world. I do not count this place mine, nor can I say the other is not mine; rather all is God's whose stranger and pilgrim I am."

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (verse 14). In these words a logical inference is drawn from the last clause of the preceding verse, which supplies a valuable hint on how the Scriptures are to be expounded. The apostle here makes known unto us what was signified by the confession of the patriarchs. Just as the negative implies the positive—"thou shalt not covet" meaning also, "thou shalt be content with what God has given"—so for saints to conduct themselves as strangers and pilgrims, and that unto the end of their sojourning in this world, makes manifest the fact that they are journeying heavenwards. "This is the genuine and proper way of interpreting Scripture: when from the words themselves, considered with relation to the persons speaking them, and to all their circumstances we declare what was their determinate mind and sense" (John Owen).

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." Their confession of strangership implied more than that they had not yet entered their promised Inheritance: it likewise showed they were earnestly pressing toward it. They had every reason so to do: it was their own "Country," for it was there God had blest them with all spiritual blessings before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3, 4), it was from there they had been born again (John 3:3, margin), it was there that their Father, Savior and fellow-saints dwell. To "seek" the promised Inheritance denotes that earnest quest of the believer after that which he supremely desires. It is this which distinguishes him from the empty professor: the latter desires that which is good for himself, as Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous" (Num. 23:10); but only the regenerate can truly say, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life" (Ps. 27:4).

To "seek" after Heaven must be the chief aim and supreme task which the Christian sets before him: laying aside all that would hinder, and using every means which God has appointed. The world must be held loosely, the affections be set upon things above, and the heart constantly exercised about treading the Narrow Way, which

alone leads thither. "Seek a Country": "Their designs are for it, their desires are after it, their discourses about it; they diligently endeavour to clear up their title to it, to have their temper suited to it, and have their conversation in it, and come to the enjoyment of it" (Matt. Henry). Heaven is here called a "Country" because of its largeness; it is a pleasant Country, the Land of uprightness, rest and joy. May Divine grace conduct both writer and reader into it.

Hebrews 11:15, 16

Chapter 64 - The Reward of Faith

Once more we would remind ourselves of the particular circumstances those saints were in to whom our Epistle was first addressed. Only as we do so are we in the best position to discern the meaning of its contents, and best fitted to make a right application of the same unto ourselves. It is not that the Hebrews were Jews according to the flesh and we Gentiles, for they, equally with us, were "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). No, it is the peculiar position which they occupied, with the pressing temptations that solicited them, which we need to carefully ponder. Divine grace had called them out of Judaism (John 10:3) but Divine judgment had not yet fallen upon Judaism. The temple was still intact, and its services continued, and as long as they did so, an appeal was made to the Hebrews to return thereunto.

Now that historical situation adumbrated a moral one. The Christian has been called out from the world to follow Christ, but the judgment of God has not yet fallen upon the world and burned it up. No, it still stands, and we are yet in it, and as long as this is the case, Satan seeks to get us to return thereunto. It is this which enables us to see the force of those verses which are now engaging our attention. Keeping in mind what has just been said, the reader should have no difficulty in discerning why the apostle reminds us, first, that the patriarchs lived on earth as strangers and pilgrims; and secondly, that they went not back again to the land of their birth. As we saw in our last article, that which was typified by the patriarchs living in separation from the Canaanites and their "dwelling in tents," was the Christian's renunciation of this world; that which was foreshadowed by their refusal to return unto Chaldea was the Christian's continued renunciation of the world, and his actual winning through to Heaven.

In the verses which are now to be before us clear light is thrown upon an essential element in the Christian life. They present to us an aspect of Truth which, in some circles, is largely ignored or

denied today. There are those who have pressed the blessed truth of the eternal Security of the Saints with a zeal that was not always according to knowledge: they have presented it in a way that suggests God preserves His people altogether apart from their use of means. They have stated it in a manner as to virtually deny the Christian's responsibility. They have implied that, having committed my soul unto the keeping of the Lord, I have no more to do with its safety, than I have with money which I have entrusted to the custody of a bank or the government. The result has been that, many who have accepted this false presentation of the truth have felt quite at ease in a course of careless and reckless living.

So one-sided is the teaching we refer to, that its advocates will not allow for a moment that there is the slightest danger of a real Christian apostatizing. If a servant of God insists that there is, and yet he also affirms that no real saint of God has perished or ever will, they consider him inconsistent and illogical. They seem unable to recognize the fact that while it be perfectly true from the side of God's eternal counsels, the value of Christ's redemption, the efficacy of the Spirit's work, that none of the elect can be finally lost; yet it is equally true from the side of the Christian's frailty, the existence of the flesh still within, his being subject unto the assaults of Satan, and his living in a wicked world, that real (not theoretical or imaginary) danger menaces him from every side. No, they fondly imagine that there is only one side to the subject, the Divine side.

But the verses we are now to ponder show the fallacy of this. So far from affirming that there was no possibility of the patriarchs going back again to that country which they had left—which, in type, would mean a returning to the world—the apostle boldly affirms (caring not who might charge him with being inconsistent with himself) that if their hearts had been set upon Chaldea, they "might have had opportunity to have returned." Had they grown weary of dwelling in tents and moving about from place to place in a strange land, and purposed to retrace their steps to Mesopotamia, what was there to hinder them so doing? True, that would have been an act of unbelief and disobedience, a despising and relinquishing of the promises; yet, from the human side, the way for them so to act was always open. Let us now weigh the details of our passage.

"And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have

returned" (verse 15). There is a threefold connection between these words and that which immediately precedes. First, at the beginning of verse 13 the apostle had affirmed that all those to whom he was referring (and to whom he was directing the special attention of the Hebrews) had "in faith died"; in all that follows to the end of verse 16 he furnishes proof of his assertion. Second, in verse 15 the apostle continues the inference he had drawn in verse 14 from the last clause of verse 13: the confession made by the patriarchs manifested that their hearts were set upon Heaven, which was further evidenced by their refusal to return to Chaldea. Third, he anticipates and removes an objection: seeing that God had commanded them to take up their residence in another land (Canaan), they were "strangers" there by necessity. No, says the apostle; they were "strangers and pilgrims" by their own consent too: their hearts as well as their bodies were separated from Chaldea.

The patriarch's remaining in a strange land was quite a voluntary thing on their part. And this brings us unto the very heart of what is a real difficulty for many: they do not see that when God "draws" a person (John 6:44), He does no violence to his will, that though exercising His sovereignty man also retains his freedom. Both are true, and hold good of the Christian life at every stage of it. Conversion itself is wholly brought about by the mighty operations of Divine grace, nevertheless it is also a free act on the part of the creature. Those who are effectually called by God out of darkness into His marvelous light, do, at conversion, surrender their whole being to Him, renouncing the flesh, the world, and the Devil, and vow to wage (by His grace) a ceaseless warfare against them. The Christian life is the habitual continuance of what took place at conversion, the carrying out of the vows then made, the putting of it into practice.

Immediately before conversion a fierce conflict takes place in the soul. On the one side is the Devil, seeking to retain his captive by presenting to it the pleasures of sin and the allurements of the world, telling the soul that there will be no more happiness if these be relinquished and the rigid requirements of Christ's commandments be heeded. On the other side is the Holy Spirit, declaring that the wages of sin is death, that the world is doomed to destruction, and that unless we renounce sin and forsake the world, we must eternally perish. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit presses upon

us that nothing short of a whole-hearted surrender to the Lordship of Christ can bring us into "the way of salvation." Torn between these conflicting impressions upon his mind, the soul is bidden to sit down and "count the cost" (Luke 14:28); to deliberately weigh the offers of Satan and the terms of Christian discipleship, and to definitely make his choice between them.

It is not that man has the power within himself to refuse the evil and choose the good; it is not that God has left it for the creature to determine his own destiny; it is not that the temptations of Satan are equally powerful with the convictions of the Holy Spirit, and that our decision turns the scale between them. No indeed: not so do the Scriptures teach, and not so does this writer believe. Sin has robbed fallen man of all Power to do good, yet not his obligation to perform it. The destiny of all creatures has been unalterably fixed by the eternal decrees of God, yet not in such a way as to reduce them to irresponsible automatons. The operations of the Holy Spirit in God's elect are invincible, yet they do no violence to the human will. But while salvation, from beginning to end, is to be wholly ascribed to the free and sovereign grace of God, it nevertheless remains that conversion itself is the voluntary act of man, his own conscious and free surrendering of himself to God in Christ.

Now the same diverse factors enter into the Christian life itself. Necessarily so, for, as said above, the Christian life is but a progressive continuance of how we begin. Repentance is not once and for all, but as often as we are conscious of having displeased God. Believing in Christ is not a single act which needs no repeating, but a constant requirement, as the "believeth" of John 3:16, and the "coming" of 1 Peter 2:4 plainly shows. So too our renunciation of the world is to be a daily process. The same objects which enthralled us before conversion are still to hand, and unless we are much upon our guard, unless our hearts are warmed and charmed by the loveliness of Christ, through maintaining a close fellowship with Him, they will soon gain power over us. Satan is ever ready to tempt, and unless we diligently seek grace to resist him, will trip us up.

"And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned," but as the next verse shows, they did not do so. In this they were in striking and blessed contrast from Esau, who sold his

birthright, valuing temporal things more highly than spiritual. In contrast from the Children of Israel who said one to another, "Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt" (Num. 14:4). In contrast from the Gadarenes, who preferred their hogs to Christ and His salvation (Mark 5). In contrast from the stony-ground hearers who "have no root, which for a while believed, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). In contrast from the apostates of 2 Peter 2:20-22, the latter end of whom is "worse with them than the beginning." Solemn warnings are these which each professing Christian needs to take to heart.

Note how positively the apostle expressed it: "And truly" or "verily." "If they had been mindful," which means, had their minds frequently dwelt upon Chaldea, had their hearts desired it. How this shows the great importance of "girding up the loins of our minds" (1 Pet. 1:13), of disciplining our thoughts, for as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). "It is in the nature of faith to mortify, not only corrupt and sinful lusts, but our natural affections, and their most vehement inclinations, though in themselves innocent, if they are any way uncompliant with duties of obedience to the commands of God—yea herein lies the principal trial of the sincerity and power of faith. Our lives, parents, wives, children, houses, possessions, our country, are the principal, proper, lawful objects of our natural affections. But when they, or any of them, stand in the way of God's commands, if they are hindrances to the doing or suffering any thing according to His will, faith doth not only mortify, weaken and take off that love, but gives us a comparative hatred of them" (John Owen).

"They might have had opportunity to have returned." They knew the way, were well furnished with funds, had plenty of time at their disposal, and health and strength for the journey. The Canaanites would not have grieved at their departure (Gen. 26:18-21), and undoubtedly their old friends would have heartily welcomed them back again. In like manner (as we have said before), the way back was wide open for the Hebrews to return unto Judaism: it was their special snare, and a constant and habitual renunciation of it was required of them. So too if we choose to return unto the world and engage again in all its vain pursuits, there are "opportunities" enough: enticements abound on every hand, and worldly friends would heartily welcome us to their society if we

would but lower our colors, drop our godliness, and follow their course.

But the patriarchs did not go back again to that country from whence they came out: instead, they persevered in the path of duty, and despite all discouragements followed that course which the Divine commandments marked out for them. In this they have left us an example. They hankered not after the wealth, honors, pleasures, or society of Chaldea: their hearts were engaged with something vastly superior. They knew that in Heaven they had "a better and enduring substance," and therefore they disdained the baubles which once had satisfied them. Divine grace had taught them that those sources of joy which they had once so eagerly sought, were "cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13); but that in Christ they had an ever-flowing well, that springeth up unto everlasting life. Grace had taught them that it is sinful to make material things the chief objects of this life: they sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

So little did Abraham esteem Chaldea that he would not go thither in person to obtain a wife for his son, nor suffer Isaac to go, but sent his servant and made him swear that he would not bring her thither, if she were unwilling to come—another illustration that nothing is more voluntary than godliness. So it is with the Christian when he is first converted: the world has lost all its attractions for him, nor can it regain its hold upon his heart so long as he walks with God. The acutest test comes in seasons of prosperity. "David professeth himself to be a stranger and a pilgrim, not only when he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, but when he was in his palace, and in his best estate. We are not to renounce our comforts, and throw away God's blessings; but we are to renounce our carnal affections. We cannot get out of the world when we please, but we must get the world out of us. It is a great trial of grace to refuse the opportunity; it is the most difficult lesson to learn how to abound, more difficult than to learn how to want, and to be abased; to have comforts, and yet to have the heart weaned from comforts; not to be necessarily mortified, but to be voluntarily mortified" (T. Manton).

It is not the absence of temptation, but the resisting of and prevailing over them which evidences the efficacy of indwelling grace. The power of voluntary godliness is manifested in the

conflict, when we have the "opportunity" to go wrong, but decline it. Joseph had not only a temptation, but the "occasion" for yielding to it, yet grace forbade (Gen. 39:9). It was the command of God which held back the patriarchs from returning to Chaldea, and the same controls the hearts of all the regenerate. "It is easy to be good when we cannot be otherwise, or when all temptations to the contrary are out of the way. All the seeming goodness there is in so many, they owe it to the want of a temptation and to the want of an opportunity of doing otherwise" (T. Manton). Not so with the real Christians.

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" (verse 16). The first half of this verse gives the positive side of what has been before us, and amplified what was said in verse 14. It is not enough to renounce the world, but we must also have our hearts carried forth unto better things: we must believe in and seek Heaven itself. There are some disdain worldly profits, but instead of seeking the true riches, are immersed in worldly pleasures. Others while despising fleshly recreations and dissipations, devote themselves to more serious occupations, yet "labor for that which satisfieth not" (Isa. 55:2). But the Christian, while passing through it, makes a sanctified use of the world, and has his affections set upon things above.

"But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly." It helps us to link together the four statements made concerning this. First, Abraham "looked for a city" (verse 10), which denotes faith's expectations of blessedness to come: it was not a mere passing glance of the mind, but a serious and constant anticipation of Celestial Bliss. Second, "They seek a Country" (verse 14): they make it the great aim and business of their lives to avoid every hindrance, overcome every obstacle, and steadfastly press forward along the Narrow Way that leads thither: "Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:19). Third, "they desire a better Country" (verse 16): they long to be relieved from the body of this death, removed from this scene of sin, and be taken to be forever with the Lord: "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23): he that has had a taste of Heaven in the joy of the spirit, his heart cries "when shall I come to the full enjoyment of my Inheritance!"

Fourth, "they declare plainly that they seek a country" (verse 14): their daily walk makes it manifest that they belong not to this world, but are citizens of Heaven.

One of the best evidences that we are truly seeking Heaven, is the possession of hearts that are weaned from this world. None will ever enter the Father's House on high in whose soul the first fruits of heavenly peace and joy does not grow now. He who finds his satisfaction in temporal things is woefully deceived if he imagines he can enjoy eternal things. He whose joy is all gone when earthly possessions are snatched from him, knows nothing of that peace which "passeth all understanding." And yet, if the auto, radio, newspaper, money to go to the movies, were taken away from the average "church-member," what would he then have left to make life worth living? O how few can really say, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17, 18).

"Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." "The word 'wherefore' denotes not the procuring or meritorious cause of the thing itself, but the consequent or what ensued thereon" (John Owen). God will be no man's Debtor: "them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30 and cf. 2 Timothy 2:21) is His sure promise. By confessing they were strangers and pilgrims, the patriarchs had avowed their supreme desire for and hope of a portion superior to any that could be found on earth. Hence, because they were willing to renounce all worldly prospects so as to follow God in an obedient faith, for the sake of an invisible but eternal inheritance, He did not disdain to be known as their Friend and Portion.

"We are hence to conclude that there is no place for us among God's children except we renounce the world, and that there will be for us no inheritance in Heaven except we become pilgrims on earth" (John Calvin).

"God is not ashamed to be called their God." Here was the grand reward of their faith. So well did God approve of their desire and design, He was pleased to give evidence of His special regard unto them. "Not ashamed" literally signifies that He had no cause to

"blush" because He had been disgraced by them—it is God speaking after the manner of men; it is the negative way of saying that He made a joyous acknowledgement of them, as a father does of dutiful children. When we think not only of the personal unworthiness of the patriarchs (fallen, sinful creatures), but also of their contemptible situation—"dwelling in tents" in a strange land—we may well marvel at the infinite condescension of the Maker of the universe identifying Himself with them. What incredible grace for the Divine Majesty to avow Himself the God of worms of the earth!

Ah, those who renounce the world for God's sake shall not be the losers. But observe it was not simply, "God is not ashamed to be their God," but "to be called their God." He took this very title in a peculiar manner: unto Moses he said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6). Thus, to be "called their God" means that He was their covenant God and Father. Not only is He the God of His children by creation and providence, but He is also unto them "the God of all grace" (1 Pet. 5:10), as He is the God of Christ and all the elect in Him. This He manifests by quickening, enlightening, guiding, protecting and making all things work together for their good. He continues to be such a God unto them through life and in death, so that they may depend upon His love, be assured of His faithfulness, count upon His power, and be safely carried through every trial, till they are landed on the shores of Eternal Bliss.

"God is not ashamed to be called their God." The wider reference is to all the elect, who have a special interest in Him. These are known, first, by the manner of their coming into this relation. God brings His people into this special relation by effectually calling them and then when He has taken possession of their hearts, they choose Him for their all-sufficient portion, and completely give up themselves to Him. Their language is, "whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Ps. 73:25). Their surrender to Him is evidenced by, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Second, by their manner of living in this relation. They glorify God by their subjection to Him, love for Him, trust in Him. Unto those who have renounced all idols, God is not ashamed to be known as their God.

Now if God be our "God" how contented we should be! "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou

maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Ps. 16:5, 6): this should ever be our language. How confident we should be! "The Lord is my Shepherd: I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1): this should ever be our boast. How joyful we should be! "Because Thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (Ps. 63:3): this should ever be our confession. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11): when brought Home to glory we shall better understand what this connotes—"their God."

How may I know that God is my "God"? Did you ever enter into covenant with Him? "Was your spirit ever subdued to yield to Him? Do you remember when you were bond-slaves of Satan, that God broke in upon you with a mighty and powerful work of grace, subduing your heart, and causing you to yield, to give the hand to Him, to come and lie at his feet, and lay down the weapons of defiance? Didst thou ever come as a guilty creature, willing to take laws from God? Though it be God's condescension to capitulate with us, yet we do not capitulate with Him as equals, but as a subdued creature, who is taken captive and ready to be destroyed every moment, and is therefore willing to yield and cry quarter. How do you behave yourselves in the covenant? Do you love God as the chiefest good? Do you seek His glory as the utmost end? Do you obey Him as the highest Lord? Do you depend on Him as your only Paymaster? This is to give God the glory of a God" (T. Manton).

"For He hath prepared for them a City." Here is the crowning evidence that He is their "God." The "City" is Heaven itself. It is spoken of as "prepared" because God did, in His eternal counsels, appoint it: see Matthew 20:23, 1 Corinthians 2:9. But sin entered? True, and Christ has put away the sins of His people, and has entered Heaven as their Representative and Forerunner: therefore has He gone there to "prepare" a place for us, having laid the foundation for this in His own merits; and hence we read of "the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:14). He is now in Heaven possessing it in our name. O what cause have we to bow in wonderment and worship.

Hebrews 11:17-19

Chapter 65 - The Faith of Abraham

This chapter is the chronology of faith, or a record of some of the outstanding acts which that grace has produced in all ages. The apostle having mentioned the works wrought by the faith of those who lived before the Flood (verses 4-7), and having spoken of the patriarchs in general (verses 8-16), now mentions them in detail. He begins again with that of Abraham, who in this glorious constellation shines forth as a star of the first magnitude, and therefore is fittingly styled the father of the faithful. Three principal products of his faith are here singled out: his leaving the land of his birth, upon the call of God (verse 8); the manner of his life in Canaan, sojourning in tents (v. 9); and his offering up of Isaac. The first pictures conversion, the second the Christian's life in this world, the third the triumphant consummation of faith.

Among all the actings of Abraham's faith nothing was more remarkable and noteworthy than the offering up of his son Isaac. Not only was it the most wonderful work of faith ever wrought, and therefore is the most illustrious of all examples for us to follow (the life and death of Christ alone excepted), but it also supplies the most blessed shadowing out of the love of God the Father in the gift of His dear Son. The resemblances pointed by the type are numerous and striking. Abraham offered up a son, his only begotten son. Abraham delivered up his son to a sacrificial death, and, in purpose, smote him. But observe too how the antitype excelled the type. Abraham's son was only a man. Abraham offered up Isaac under Divine command: God was under no constraint, but gave Christ freely. Abraham's son suffered not; Christ did.

Let it not be forgotten that the chief design before the apostle throughout this chapter, was to demonstrate unto his tried brethren the great efficacy of faith: its power to sustain a very great trial, to perform a very difficult duty, and to obtain a very important blessing. Unmistakably were these three things illustrated in the case we are now to consider. As we have already seen, it was not without

good reason that Abraham is designated the father of all who believe. But among all the actings of his faith none was more memorable than its exercise upon Mount Moriah. If we consider the object of it, the occasion of it, the hindrances which stood in his way, and his blessed victory, we cannot but admire and wonder at the power of Divine grace triumphing over the weakness of the flesh.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son" (verse 17). For a clearer understanding of this verse we need to consult Genesis 22: there we read, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (verses 1, 2). The whole of what follows in Genesis 22, to the end of verse 19, should be carefully read. Before attempting to expound our present verse and make application to ourselves of its practical teachings, let us seek to remove one or two difficulties which may stand in the way of the thoughtful reader.

First, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." The word "offered up" is the same that is used for slaying and offering up sacrifices. Here then is the problem: how could Abraham "offer up" his son by faith, seeing that it was against both the law of nature and the law of God for a man to slay his own son? Genesis 22:2, however, shows that his faith had a sure foundation to rest upon, for the Lord Himself had commanded him so to do. But this only appears to remove the difficulty one stage farther back: God Himself had laid it down as a law that "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9:6). True, but though His creatures are bound by the laws He has prescribed them, God Himself is not.

God is under no law, but is absolute Sovereign. Moreover, He is the Lord of life, both Giver and Preserver of it, and therefore has He an indisputable right to dispose of it, to take it away when He pleases, by what means or instruments He sees fit. God possesses supreme authority, and when He pleases sets aside His own laws, or issues new ones contrary to those given previously. By His own

imperial fiat, Jehovah now, by special and extraordinary command, constituted it a duty for Abraham to do what before had been a sin. In similar manner, He who gave commandment "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness" (Ex. 20:4), ordered Moses to make a brazen serpent (Num. 21:8)! Learn, then, that God is bound by no law, being above all law.

Second, but how could it be truly said that Abraham "offered up Isaac," seeing that he did not actually slay him? In regard to his willingness, in regard to his set purpose, and in regard to God's acceptance of the will for the deed, he did do so. There was no reserve in his heart, and there was no failure in his honest endeavors. He took the three days' journey to the appointed place of sacrifice; he bound Isaac unto the altar, and took the knife into his hand to slay him. And God accepted the will for the deed. This exemplifies a most important principle in connection with God's acceptance of the Christian's obedience. The terms of His law have not been lowered: God still requires of us personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience. But this we are unable to render to Him while in our present state. And so, for Christ's sake, where the heart (at which God ever looks) truly desires to fully please Him in all things, and makes an honest and sincere effort to do so, God graciously accepts the will for the deed. Carefully ponder 2 Corinthians 8:12 which illustrates the same blessed fact, and note the word "willing" in Hebrews 13:18!

Third, the statement made in Genesis 22:1, "God did tempt Abraham," or as our text says, "when he was tried," for that is exactly what both the original Hebrew and Greek word signifies: to make trial of. "It is an act of God whereby He proveth and makes experience of the loyalty and obedience of His servants" (W. Perkins). And this not for His own information (for He "knoweth our thoughts afar off"), but for their own knowledge and that of their fellows. Christ put the rich young ruler to the proof when He said, "Go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor" (Matthew 19:21). So too He made trial of the Canaanitish woman when He said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26).

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." In order to understand and appreciate the fact that it was "by faith" Abraham offered up Isaac, we must examine more closely the nature of that test to which the Lord submitted the one whom He

condescended to call his "friend." In bidding him to sacrifice his beloved son, that ordeal combined in it various and distinct features: it was a testing of his submission or loyalty to God; it was a testing of his affections, as to whom he really loved the more: God or Isaac; it was a testing of which was the stronger within him: grace or sin; but supremely, it was a testing of his faith.

Carnal writers see in this incident little more than a severe trial of Abraham's natural affections. It cannot be otherwise, for water never rises above its own level; and carnal men are incapable of discerning spiritual things. But it is to be carefully noted that Hebrews 11:17 does not say, "In submission to God's holy will, Abraham offered up Isaac," though that was true; nor "out of supreme love for God he offered his son," though that was also the case. Instead, the Holy Spirit declares that it was "by faith" that the patriarch acted, declaring that "he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." Most of the modern commentators, filled with fleshly sentiment rather than with the Holy Spirit, completely miss this point, which is the central beauty of our verse. Let us seek then to attend unto it the more particularly.

In calling upon Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering, the Lord submitted his faith to a fiery ordeal. How so? Because God's promises to Abraham concerning his "seed" centered in Isaac, and in bidding him slay his only son, He appeared to contradict Himself. Ishmael had been cast out, and Isaac's posterity alone was to be reckoned to Abraham as the blessed seed among whom God would have His church. Isaac had been given to Abraham after he had long gone childless and when Sarah's womb was dead, therefore there was no likelihood of his having any more sons by her. At the time, Isaac himself was childless, and to kill him looked like cutting off all his hopes. How then could Abraham reconcile the Divine command with the Divine promise? To sacrifice his son and heir was not only contrary to his natural affections, but opposed to carnal reason as well.

In like manner God tests the faith of His people today. He calls upon them to perform the acts of obedience which are contrary to their natural affections and which are opposed to carnal reason. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). How many a Christian has had his or her affections drawn out toward a non-Christian, and

then has come to them that piercing word, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14)! How many a child of God has had his membership in a "church" where he saw that Christ was dishonored; to heed that Divine command, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17) entailed leaving behind those near and dear in the flesh; but the call of God could not be disregarded, no matter how painful obedience to it might be.

But when are we put to such a trial as to offer up our Isaac? To this question the Puritan Manton returned a threefold answer. First, in the case of submission to the strokes of providence, when near relations are taken away from us. God knows how to strike us in the right vein; there will be the greatest trial where our love is set. Second, in case of self-denial, forsaking our choicest interests for a good conscience. We must not only part with mean things, but such as we prize above anything in the world. When God requires it (as He did with the writer) that we should forsake father and mother, we must not demur; nay, our lives should not be dear unto us (Acts 20:24). Third, in mortifying our bosom lust: this is what is signified by cutting off a "right hand" or plucking out a "right eye" (Matthew 5:29, 30).

Let us notice the time when Abraham was thus tested. The Holy Spirit has emphasized this in Genesis 22:1 by saying, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." A double reference seems to be made in these words. First, a general one to all the preceding trials which Abraham had endured -- his journey to Canaan, his sojourning there in tents, the long, long wait for the promised heir. Now that he had passed through a great fight of afflictions, he is called upon to suffer a yet severer test. Ah, God educates His children little by little: as they grow in grace harder tasks are assigned them, and deeper waters are called upon to be passed through, that enlarged opportunities may be afforded for manifesting their increased faith in God. It is not the raw recruit, but the scarred veteran, who is assigned a place in the front ranks in the battle. Think it not strange then, fellow-Christian, if thy God is now appointing thee severer tests than He did some years ago.

Second, a more specific reference is made in Genesis 22:1 to what is recorded in the previous chapter: the miraculous birth of Isaac, the great feast that Abraham made, when he was weaned

(verse 8), and the casting out of Ishmael (verse 14). The cup of the patriarch's joy was now full. His outlook seemed most promising: not a cloud appeared on the horizon. Yet it was then, like a heavy clap of thunder out of a clear sky, that the most trying test of all came upon him! Yes, and so it was just after God had pronounced Job "a perfect man and an upright" that He delivered all that he had into Satan's hands (Job 1:8, 12). So too it was when Paul had been rapt to the third heaven, when he received such "abundance of revelations," that there was given him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him" (2 Cor. 12:1-7).

How we need to seek grace that we may be enabled to hold every thing down here with a light hand. Rightly did an old writer say, "Build not thy nest on any earthly tree, for the whole forest is doomed to be cut down." It is not only for God's glory, but for our own good, that we set our affections upon "things above." And in view of what has just been before us, how necessary it is that we should expect and seek in advance to be prepared for severe trials. Are we not bidden to "hear for the time to come" (Isa. 42:23)? The more we calmly anticipate future trials, the less likely are we to be staggered and overcome by them when they arrive: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12).

Having observed the time when Abraham was tested, let us now consider the severity of his trial. First the act itself. Abraham was ordered to slay, not all his bullocks and herds, but a human being; and that not one of his faithful servants, but his beloved son. Abraham was bidden, not to banish from home or send him out of Canaan, but to cut him off out of the land of the living. He was commanded to do a thing for which no reason could be assigned save the authority of Him who gave the command. He was bidden to do that which was most abhorrent to natural feeling. He must not only consent unto the death of his dear Isaac, but himself be his executioner. He was to slay one who was guilty of no crime, but who (according to the Divine record) was an unusually dutiful, loving, and obedient child. Was ever such a demand made upon a human creature before or since!

Second, consider the offerer. In our text he is presented in a particular character: "he that had received the promises," which is the key clause to the verse. God had declared unto Abraham that He

would establish an everlasting covenant with Isaac and with his seed after him (Gen. 17:9). Isaac, and none other, was the "seed" by whose posterity Canaan should be possessed (Gen. 12:7). It was through him that all nations should be blessed (Gen. 17:7), and therefore it must be through him that Christ, according to the flesh, would proceed. These promises Abraham had "received": he had given credit for them, firmly believed them, fully expected their performance. Now the accomplishment of those promises depended upon the preservation of Isaac's life—at least until he had a son; and to sacrifice him now, appeared to render them all null and void, making their fulfillment impossible.

"He that had received the promises" — "which noteth not only the revelation of the promises, concerning a numerous issue, and the Messiah to come of his loins, but the entertaining of them and cordial assent to them. He received them not only a private believer, but as a feoffee in trust for the use of the church. In the first ages of the world God had some eminent persons who received a revelation of His will in the name of the rest. This was Abraham's case, and he is here viewed not only as a father, a loving father, but as one who had received the promises as a public person, and father of the faithful—the person whom God had chosen in whom to deposit the promises" (T. Manton). Herein lay the spiritual acuteness of the trial: would he not in slaying Isaac be faithless to his trust? would he not by his own act place the gravestone on all hope for the fulfillment of such promises?

Forcibly did Matthew Henry, when commenting upon the time at which Abraham received this trying command from God, say, "After he had received the promises that this Isaac should build up his family, and that 'in him his seed should be called' (Heb. 11:18), and that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah, and all nations blessed in Him; so that in being called to offer up his Isaac, he seemed to be called to destroy and cut off his own family, to cancel the promises of God, to prevent the coming of Christ, to destroy the whole truth, to sacrifice his own soul and his hope of salvation, to cut off the church of God at one blow; a most terrible trial!" If Isaac were slain, then all seemed to be lost.

It may be asked, But why should God thus try the faith of the patriarch? For Abraham's own sake that he might the better know the efficacy of that grace which God had bestowed upon him. As the

suspending of a heavy weight upon a chain reveals either its weakness or its strength, so God places His people in varied circumstances which manifest that state of their hearts—whether or no their trust be really in Him. The Lord tried Hezekiah to show unto him his frailty (2 Chron. 32:31); he tried Job to show that though He slew him yet would he trust in God. Second, for the sake of others, that Abraham might be an example to them. God had called him to be the father of the faithful, and therefore would He show unto all generations of his children what grace He had conferred upon him—what a worthy "father" or pattern he was (condensed from W. Gouge).

In like manner, God tries His people today and puts to the proof the grace which He has communicated to their hearts: this, both for His own glory, and for their own comfort. The Lord is determined to make it manifest that He has on earth a people who will forsake any comfort and endure any misery rather than forego their plain duty; who love Him better than their own lives, and who are prepared to trust Him in the dark. So too we are the gainers, for we never have clearer proof of the reality of grace than when we are under sore trials. "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope" (Rom. 5:3, 4). As another has said, "By knocking upon the vessel we see whether it is full or empty, cracked or sound, so by these knocks of providence we are discovered."

Rightly did John Owen point out, "Trials are the only touchstone of faith, without which men must want (lack) the best evidence of its sincerity and efficacy, and the best way of testifying it unto others. Wherefore we ought not to be afraid of trials, because of the admirable advantages of faith, in and by them." Yea, the Word of God goes farther, and bids us, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" or "trials," declaring "that the trying of your faith worketh patience; but let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). So too, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (or "trials") 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 honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:6, 7).

In conclusion, let us observe how Abraham conducted

himself under this sore trial: "he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son." Many instructive details concerning this are recorded in Genesis 22. There it will be found that Abraham consulted not with Sarah—why should he, when he already knew God's will on the matter! Nor was there any disputing with God, as to the apparently flagrant discrepancy between His present command and His previous promises. Nor was there any delay: "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him" (Gen. 22:3). And how is his unparalleled action to be accounted for? From what super-fleshly principle did it spring? A single word gives the answer: FAITH. Not a theoretical faith, not a mere head-knowledge of God, but a real, living, spiritual, triumphant, faith.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." By faith in the Divine justice and wisdom behind the command so to act. By faith in the veracity and faithfulness of God to make good His own promises. Fully assured that God was able to fulfill His word, Abraham closed his eyes to all difficulties, and steadfastly counted upon the power of Him that cannot lie. This is the very nature or character of a spiritual faith: it persuades the soul of God's absolute supremacy, unerring wisdom, unchanging righteousness, infinite love, almighty power. In other words, it rests upon the character of the living God, and trusts Him in the face of every obstacle. Spiritual faith makes its favored possessor judge that the greatest suffering is better than the least sin; yea, it unhesitatingly avows "Thy loving kindness is better than life" (Ps. 63:3).

We must leave for our next article the consideration of the remainder of our passage. But in view of what has already been before us, is not both writer and reader constrained to cry unto God, "Lord, have mercy upon me, Pardon my vile unbelief, and graciously subdue its awful power. Be pleased, for Christ's sake, to work in me that spiritual and supernatural faith which will honor Thee and bear fruits to Thy glory. And if Thou hast, in Thy discriminating grace, already communicated to me this precious, precious gift, then graciously deign to strengthen it by the power of Thy Holy Spirit; call it forth into more frequent exercise and action. Amen."

Hebrews 11:17-19

Chapter 66 - The Faith of Abraham

"Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13). The Lord has an absolute claim upon us, upon all that we have. As our Maker and Sovereign He has the right to demand from us anything He pleases, and whatsoever He requires we must yield (1 Chron. 29:11). All that we have comes from Him, and must be held for Him, and at His disposal (1 Chron. 29:14). The Christian is under yet deeper obligations to part with anything God may ask from him: loving gratitude for Christ and His so great salvation, must loosen our hold on every cherished temporal thing. The bounty of God should encourage us to surrender freely whatever He calls for, for none ever lose by giving up anything to God. Yet powerful as are these considerations to any renewed mind, the fact remains that they move us not until faith is in exercise. Faith it is which causes us to yield to God, respond to His claims, and answer His calls.

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb. 11:17-19). The apostle's purpose in citing this remarkable incident, was to show that it is the property of faith to carry its possessor through the greatest trials, with a cheerful submission and acceptable obedience to the will of God. In order to make this clearer unto the reader, let us endeavor to exhibit the powerful influence which faith has to support the soul under and carry it through testings and trials.

First, faith judgeth of all things aright: it impresses us with a sense of the uncertainty and fleetingness of earthly things, and causes us to highly esteem invisible and heavenly things. Faith is a spiritual prudence opposed not only to ignorance, but also to folly: so much unbelief as we have, so much folly is ours—"O fools and

slow of heart to believe" (Luke 24:25). Faith is a spiritual wisdom, teaching us to value the favour of God, the smiles of His countenance, the comforts of Heaven; it shows us that all outward things are nothing in comparison with inward peace and joy. Carnal reason prizes the concerns of the present life and grasps at its riches and honors; sense is occupied with fleshly pleasures; but faith knows "Thy loving kindness is better than life" (Ps. 63:3).

Second, faith solves all riddles and doubts when we are in a dilemma: what a problem confronted Abraham; what! shall I offer Isaac and bring to naught God's promises, or must I disobey Him on the other side? Faith removed the difficulty: "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Faith believes the accomplishment of the promise, whatever reason and sense may say to the contrary; it cuts the knot by a resolute dependence upon the power and fidelity of God. Faith casts down carnal imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Third, faith is a grace which looks to future things, and in the light of their reality the hardest trials seem nothing. Sense is occupied only with things present, and thus to nature it appears troublesome and bitter to deny ourselves. But the language of faith is, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:17, 18). Faith looks within the veil, and so has a mighty influence to support the soul in time of trial. He who walks in the light of Eternity goes calmly and happily along through the mists and fogs of time; neither the frowns of men nor the blandishments of the world affect him, for he has a ravishing and affecting sight of the glorious Inheritance to which he is journeying.

Fourth, "faith worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), and then nothing is too near and dear to us if the relinquishing of them will glorify God. Faith not only looks forward, but backward; it reminds the soul of what great things God has done for us in Christ. He has given us His beloved Son, and He is worth infinitely more than all we can give to Him. Yes, faith apprehends the wondrous love of God in Christ, and says, If He gave the Darling of His bosom to die for me, shall I stick at any little sacrifice? If God gave me Christ shall I deny Him my Isaac: I love him well, but I love God better. Thus faith

works, urging the soul with the love of God, that we may out of thankfulness to Him part with those comforts which He requires of us.

"Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called" (verse 18). This was brought in by the apostle to show wherein lay the greatest obstacle before Abraham's faith. First, he was called on to "offer up" his son and heir. Second, and this after he had "received the promises." Third, not Ishmael, but his "only begotten" or well-beloved Isaac—this is the force of the expression: it is a term of endearment as John 1:18, 3:16 shows. Fourth, he must slay the one from whom the Messiah Himself was to issue, for this is clearly the meaning of the Divine promise recorded in verse 18.

Long ago John Owen called attention to the fact that the Socinians (Unitarians) reduced God's promise to Abraham unto two heads: first that of a numerous posterity, and second that this posterity should inhabit and enjoy the land of Canaan as an inheritance. But this, as he pointed out, directly contradicts the apostle, who in Heb. 11:39 affirms that, when they had possessed the land of Canaan almost unto the utmost period of its grant unto them, had not received the accomplishment of the promise--we wish our modern "dispensationalists" would ponder that verse. While it is true that the numerous posterity of Abraham and their occupancy of Canaan were both means and pledges of the fulfillment of the promise, yet Acts 2:38, 39 and Galatians 3:16 make it unmistakably plain that the subject-matter of the promise was Christ Himself, with the whole work of His meditation for the redemption and salvation of His Church.

"Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called." This Divine promise is first found in Genesis 21:12, and the occasion of God's giving it unto Abraham supplies us with another help towards determining its significance. In the context there, we find that the Lord had given orders for the casting out of Hagar and her son, and we read, "And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son" (Gen. 21:11). Then it was, to console his stricken heart, that Jehovah said unto His "friend": grieve not over Hagar's son, for I will give thee One who is better than a million Ishmaels; I will give thee a son from whom shall descend none other than the promised Savior and Redeemer. And now Abraham was called upon to slay him who was the marked-out

progenitor of the Messiah! No ordinary faith was called for here!

Who can doubt but that now Abraham was sorely pressed by Satan! Would he not point out how "inconsistent" God was?--as he frequently will to us, if we are foolish enough to listen to his vile accusations. Would he not appeal to his sentiments and say, How will Sarah regard you when she learns that you have killed and reduced to ashes the child of her old age? Would he not seek to persuade Abraham that God was playing with him, that He did not really mean to be taken seriously, that he could not be so cruel as to require a righteous father to be the executioner of his own dutiful son? In the light of all that is revealed of our great Enemy in Holy Writ, and in view of our own experience of his fiendish assaults, who can doubt but what Abraham now became the immediate object of the Devil's attack.

Ah, nothing but a mind that was stayed upon the Lord could have then resisted the Devil, and performed a task which was so difficult and painful. "Had he been weak in faith, he would have doubted whether two revelations, apparently inconsistent, could come from the same God, or, if they did, whether such a God ought to be trusted and obeyed. But being strong in faith, he reasoned in this way: This is plainly God's command, I have satisfactory evidence of that; and therefore it ought to be immediately and implicitly obeyed. I know Him to be perfectly wise and righteous, and what He commands must be right. Obedience to this command does indeed seem to throw obstacles in the way of the fulfillment of a number of promises which God has made to me. I am quite sure that God has made those promises; I am quite sure that He will perform them. How He is to perform them, I cannot tell. That is His province, not mine. It is His to promise, and mine to believe; His to command, and mine to obey" (John Brown).

The incident we are now considering shows us again that faith has to do not only with the promises of God, but with His precepts as well. Yea, this is the central thing which is here set before us. Abraham had been "strong in faith" when God had declared he should have a son by his aged wife (Rom. 4:19), not being staggered by the seemingly insurmountable difficulty that stood in the way; and now he was strong in faith when God bade him slay his son, refusing to be deterred by the apparently immovable obstacle which his act would interpose before his

receiving the Seed through Isaac. Ah, dear reader, make no mistake upon this point: a faith which is not as much and as truly engaged with the precepts as it is with the promises of God, is not the faith of Abraham, and therefore is not the faith of God's elect. Spiritual faith does not pick and choose: it fears God as well as loves Him.

As the promises are not believed with a lively faith unless they draw off our hearts from the carnal vanities to seek that happiness which they offer us, so the commandments are not believed rightly unless we be fully resolved to acquiesce in them as the only rule to guide us in the obtaining that happiness, and to adhere to and obey them. The Psalmist declared, "I have believed Thy commandments" (Ps. 119:66); he recognized God's authority behind them, there was a readiness of heart to hear His voice in them, there was a determination of will for his actions to be regulated by them. So it was with Abraham, and so it must be with us if we would furnish proof that he is our "father." "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39).

God's Word is not to be taken piece-meal by us, but received into our hearts as a whole: every part must affect us, and stir up dispositions in us which each several part is suited to produce. If the promises stir up comfort and joy, the commandments must stir up love, fear, and obedience. The precepts are a part of Divine revelation. The same Word which calls upon us to believe in Christ as an all-sufficient Savior, also bids us to believe the commandments of God, for the molding of our hearts and the guiding of our ways. There is a necessary connection between the precepts and the promises, for the latter cannot do us good until the former be heeded: our consent to the Law precedes our faith in the Gospel. God's commands "are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Christ must be accepted as Lawgiver before He becomes our Redeemer: Isaiah 33:22.

How the readiness of Abraham to sacrifice his son condemns those who oppose God's commands, and will not sacrifice their wicked and filthy lusts! "Whosoever he be of you," says Christ, "that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33): by which He meant, until he does in heart sincerity and resolute endeavor turn away from all that stands in competition (for our affections) with the Lord Jesus, he cannot become a Christian:

see Isaiah 55:7. In vain do we claim to be saved if the world still rules our hearts. Divine grace not only delivers from the wrath to come, but even now it effectually "teaches" its recipients to deny "all ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12).

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (verse 19). Here we learn what was the immediate object of Abraham's faith on this occasion, namely, the mighty power of God. He was fully assured that the Lord would work a miracle rather than fail of His promise. Ah, my brethren, it is by meditating upon God's sufficiency that the heart is quietened and faith is established. In times of temptation when the soul is heavy with doubts and fears, great relief may be obtained by pondering the Divine attributes, particularly, God's omnipotency. His all-mighty power is a special prop to faith. The faith of saints has in all ages been much strengthened hereby. Thus it was with the three Hebrews: "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:17)! "With God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27): He is able to make good His word, though all earth and hell seem to make against it.

Here too we see exhibited another of faith's attributes, namely, the committal of events unto God. Carnal reason is unable to rest until a solution is in sight, until it can see a way out of its difficulties. But faith spreads the need before God, rolls the burden upon Him, and calmly leaves the solution to Him. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established" (Prov. 16:3): when this is truly done by faith we are eased of many tossings of mind and agitations of soul that would otherwise distress us. So here, Abraham committed the event unto God, reckoning on His power to raise Isaac again, though he should be killed. This is the very nature of spiritual faith: to refer our case unto Him, and wait calmly and expectantly for the promised deliverance, though we can neither perceive nor imagine the manner in which it shall be brought about. "Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him; and He shall bring to pass" (Ps. 37:5).

O how little faith is in exercise among the professing people of God today. Occupied almost wholly with the rising tide of evil in the world, with the rapid spread of Romanism, with the apostasy of Protestantism, the vast majority of those now bearing the name of

Christ conclude that we are facing a hopeless situation. Such people seem to be ignorant of the history of the past. Both in O.T. times and at different periods of this dispensation, things have been far worse than they now are. Moreover, such trembling pessimists leave out God: is not HE "able" to cope with the present situation? A hesitating "Yes" may be given, at once nullified by the query, "But where is the promise that He will do so?" Where? Why in Isaiah 59:19, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood (has he not already done so!), the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him"—but who believes it!

Ah, my Christian reader, ponder thoughtfully that blessed affirmation of Him that cannot lie, and then bow the head in shame for thine unbelief. Every thing in the world may seem to lie dead against the fulfillment of many a Divine promise, yet no matter how dark and dreadful the outlook appears, the Church of God on earth today is not facing nearly so critical and desperate a situation as did the father of the faithful when he had his knife at the breast of him on whose one life the accomplishment of all the promises did depend. Yet he rested in the faithfulness and power of God to secure His own veracity: and so may we do also at this present juncture. He who responded to the faith of sorely-tried Abraham, to the faith of Moses when Israel stood before the Red Sea, to the three Hebrews when cast in Babylon's furnace, will to ours, if we really trust Him. Forsake then your newspapers, brethren, get ye to your knees, and pray expectantly for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Man's extremity is always God's opportunity.

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." This supplies an interesting sidelight on the spiritual intelligence of the patriarchs. The O.T. saints were very far from being as ignorant as some of our superficial moderns suppose. Erroneous conclusions have often been drawn from the silence of Genesis on various matters: the later books of Scripture frequently supplement the concise accounts supplied in the earlier ones. Rightly did John Owen point out, "Abraham firmly believed, not only in the immortality of the souls of men, but also the resurrection from the dead. Had he not done so, he could not have betaken himself unto this relief in his distress. Other things he might have thought of, wherein God might have exercised His power; but he could not believe that He would do it, in that which itself was not

believed by him."

Some, perhaps, think that Owen drew too much on his imagination, that he read into Hebrews 11:19 what is not really there. If so, they are mistaken. There is one clear statement in Genesis 22, which, though not quoted by the eminent Puritan, fully establishes his assertion: there we are told that the patriarch said unto his young men, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (verse 5). This is exceedingly blessed. It shows us that Abraham was not occupied with his faith, his obedience, or with anything in himself, but solely with the living God: the "worship" of Him filled his heart and engaged all his thoughts. The added words "and come again to you" make it unmistakably plain that Abraham confidently expected Jehovah to raise again from the dead the one he was about to sacrifice unto Him as a burnt offering. A wonderful triumph of faith was this: recorded for the praise of the glory of God's grace, and for our instruction.

O my dear brethren and sisters in Christ, we want you to do something more than read through this article: we long for you to meditate upon this blessed sequel to Abraham's sore trial. He was tested as none other ever was, and grand was the outcome; but between that testing and its happy issue there was the exercise of faith, the counting upon God to interpose on his behalf, the trusting in His all-sufficient power. And God did not fail him: though He tried his faith to the limit, yet in the nick of time the Lord intervened. This is recorded for our encouragement, especially for those who are now passing through a fiery furnace. He who can deliver from death, what cannot He do! Say then with one of old, "Neither is there any Rock (to stay ourselves upon) like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2): Hannah had found a mighty support to her faith in the power of God.

"By faith Abraham . . . offered up Isaac . . . accounting that God was able to raise him up." Faith, then, expects a recompense from God. Faith knows that it is a saving bargain to lose things for Christ's sake. Faith looks for a restitution of comforts again, either in kind or in value: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, . . . for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren... and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29, 30)—that is, either actually so, or an abundant equivalent. When one of the kings of Israel was

bidden by the Lord to dismiss the army he had hired, he was troubled, and asked, "What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel" (2 Chron. 25:9); whereupon the prophet replied, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this"! When a man, through faithfulness to Christ, is exposed unto the frowns of the world, and his family faces starvation, let him know that God will undertake for him. The Lord will be no man's Debtor.

"From whence also he received him in a figure" (verse 19). Abraham had, as to his purpose, sacrificed Isaac, so that he considered him as dead; and he (thus) received him back from the dead—not really, but in a manner bearing likeness to such a miracle. This illustrates and demonstrates the truth of what has just been said above. God returns again to us what we offer to Him: "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). "That which he hath given will He pay him again" (Prov. 19:17), for He will not be beholden to any of His creatures. Hannah gave up Samuel to the Lord, and she had many more children in return (1 Sam. 2:20, 21). How great, then, is the folly of those who withhold from God anything which He asks of them: how they forsake their own mercies, stand in their own light, and hinder their own good.

"From whence also he received him in a figure." Here is the grand outcome of the patriarch's faith. First, the trial was withdrawn, Isaac was spared: the speediest way to end a trial is to be completely resigned to it; if we would save our life, we must lose it. Second, he had the expressed approval of the Lord, "now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12): he whose conscience is clear before God enjoys great peace. Third, he had a clearer view of Christ than he had before: "Abraham saw My day" said the Savior—the closer we keep to the path of obedience the more real and precious will Christ be unto us. Fourth, he obtained a fuller revelation of God's name: he called Him "Jehovah-Jireh" (Gen. 22:14): the more we stand the test of trial the better instructed shall we be in the things of God. Fifth, the covenant was confirmed to him (Gen. 22:16, 17): the quickest road to full assurance is full obedience.

Hebrews 11:20

Chapter 67 - The Faith of Isaac

Though Isaac lived the longest of the four great patriarchs, yet less is recorded about him than any of the others: some twelve chapters are devoted to the biography of Abraham, and a similar number each to Jacob and Joseph, but excepting for one or two brief mentionings before and after, the history of Isaac is condensed into two chapters, Genesis 26, 27. Contrasting his character with those of his father, and of his son, we may remark that there is noted less of Abraham's triumphs of faith, and less of Jacob's failures. Taking it on the whole, the life of Isaac is a disappointing one: it begins brightly, but ends amid the shadows—like that of so many, it failed to fulfill its early promise.

The one act in Isaac's life which the Holy Spirit selected for mention in the Scroll of Faith takes us back to Genesis 27, where, as the Puritan Owen well said, "There is none (other story) in the scripture filled with more intricacies and difficulties as unto a right judgment of the things related, though the matter of fact be clearly and distinctly set down. The whole represents unto us Divine sovereignty, wisdom and faithfulness, working effectually through the frailties, infirmities, and sins of all the persons concerned in the matter."

Genesis 27 opens by presenting unto us Isaac in his old age, and declares that "his eyes were dim, so that he could not see" (verse 1). It ought not to need saying that we have there something more than a mere reference to the state of his physical eyes, yet in these days when so many glory in their understanding the Word "literally," God's servants need to dwell upon the most elementary spiritual truths. Everything in Holy Writ has a deeper significance than the "literal," and we are greatly the losers when we limit ourselves to the "letter" of any verse. Let us contrast this statement concerning Isaac's defective vision with what is recorded of another servant of God at the same advanced age: "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim" (Deut. 34:7).

Genesis 27 shows us the low state into which a child of God may get. Isaac presents unto us a solemn warning of the evil consequences which follow failure to judge and refuse our natural appetites. If we do not mortify our members which are upon the earth, if we do not abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, then the fine edge of our spiritual life will be blunted, and the fine gold will become dim. If we live to eat, instead of eating to live, our spiritual vision is bound to be defective. Discernment is a by-product, the fruit and result of the denying of self, and following of Christ (John 8:12). It was this self-abnegation which was so conspicuous in Moses: he learned to refuse that which appealed to the flesh a position of honor as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; that is why his "eye was not dim."—He saw that the brick-making Hebrews were the people of God, the objects of His sovereign favor, and following his spiritual promptings, threw in his lot with them.

How different was the case with poor Isaac! Instead of keeping his body in subjection, he indulged it. More than a hint of this is given in Genesis 25:28, "And Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison": this brought him under the influence of one who could be of no help to him spiritually, and he loved him because he ministered unto his fleshly appetites. And now in Genesis 27, when he thought that the end of his days was near, and he desired to bestow the patriarchal blessing upon his son, instead of giving himself to fasting and prayer, and then acting in accord with the revealed will of God, we are told that he called for Esau and said, "Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and hunt me some venison; and make me some savory meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die" (Gen. 27:3, 4). This is what furnishes the key to the immediate sequel.

"And the Lord said unto her (viz., Rebekah), Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). This is the scripture which supplies the second key to the whole incident recorded in Genesis 27 and opens for us Hebrews 11:20. Here we find God making known the destiny of Jacob and Esau: observe that this revelation was made unto the mother (who had "inquired of the Lord": verse 22), and not to their father. That, later on, Isaac himself

became acquainted with its terms, is clear, but as to how far he really apprehended their meaning, is not easy to say.

The word that the Lord had spoken unto her, Rebekah believed; yet she failed to exercise full confidence in Him. When she saw Isaac's marked partiality for Esau, and learned that her husband was about to perform the last religious act of a patriarchal priest and pronounce blessing on his sons, she became fearful. When she heard Isaac bid Esau make him some "savory meat"—evidently desiring to enkindle or intensify his affections for Esau, so that he might bless him with all his heart—she imagined that the purpose of God was about to be thwarted, and resorted unto measures which ill become a daughter of Jehovah, and which can by no means be justified. We will not dwell upon the deception which she prompted Jacob to adopt, but would point out that it supplies a solemn example of a real faith being resolutely fixed on the Divine promises, but employing irregular ways and wrong means for the obtaining of them.

In what follows we see how Isaac was deceived by Jacob posing as Esau. Though uneasy and suspicious at first, his fears were largely allayed by Jacob's lies: though perceiving the voice was that of the younger son, yet his hands appeared to be those of the elder. Pathetic indeed is it to see the aged patriarch reduced unto the sense of touch in his efforts to identify the one who had now brought him the longed-for venison. It is this which should speak loudly to our hearts: he who yields to the lusts of the flesh injures his spiritual instincts, and opens wide the door for the Devil to impose upon him and deceive him with his lies! He who allows natural sentiments and affections to override the requirements of God's revealed will, is reduced to a humiliated state in the end. How often it proves that a man's spiritual foes are they of his own household! Isaac loved Esau unwisely.

But now we must face a difficult question: Did Isaac deliberately pit himself against the known counsel of God? Did he defiantly purpose to bestow upon Esau what he was assured the Lord had appointed for Jacob? "Whatever may be spoken in excuse of Isaac, it is certain he failed greatly in two things. First, in his inordinate love to Esau (whom he could not but know to be a profane person), and that on so slight an account as eating of his venison: Genesis 25:28. Second, in that he had not sufficiently

enquired into the mind of God, in the oracle that his wife received concerning their sons. There is not question on the one hand, but that he knew of it; nor on the other, that he did not understand it. For if the holy man had known that it was the determinate will of God, he would not have contradicted it. But this arose from want of diligent enquiry by prayer, into the mind of God" (John Owen).

We heartily agree with these remarks of the eminent Puritan. While the conduct of Isaac on this occasion was far from becoming a child of God who concluded his earthly pilgrimage was now nearly complete, yet charity forbids us to put the worst possible construction upon his action. While his affection for Esau was misplaced, yet, in the absence of any clear scriptural proof, we are not warranted in thinking that he sinned presumptuously, by deliberately resisting the revealed will of God; rather must we conclude that he had no clear understanding of the Divine oracle given to Rebekah—his spiritual discernment was dim, as well as his physical vision! As to the unworthy part played by Rebekah and Jacob, their efforts are to be regarded not so much as the feverish energies of the flesh, seeking to force the fulfilment of God's promise, but as well-meant but misguided intentions to prevent the thwarting of God's purpose. Their fears remind us of Uzzah's in 2 Samuel 6:6.

The one bright spot in the somber picture which the Holy Spirit has so faithfully painted for us in Genesis 27, found in verse 33. Right after Isaac had pronounced the major blessing on Jacob, Esau entered the tent, bringing with him the savory meat which he had prepared for his father. Isaac now realized the deception which had been played upon him, and we are told that he "trembled very exceedingly." Was he shaking with rage at Jacob's treachery? No indeed. Was he, as one commentator has suggested, fearful that he might suffer injury at the hands of the hot-headed Esau? No, his next words explode such a theory. Rather was it he now realized that he had been out of harmony with the Divine will, and that God had providentially intervened to effect His own counsels. He was awed to the very depths of his soul.

Blessed indeed is it to behold how the spirit triumphed over the flesh. Instead of bursting out with an angry curse upon the head of Jacob, Isaac said, "I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed." That was the language of faith overcoming his natural

partiality for Esau. It was the recognizing and acknowledging of the immutability and invincibility of the Divine decrees. He realized that God is in one mind, and none can turn Him: that though there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand (Prov. 19:21). Nor could the tears of Esau move the patriarch. Now that the entrance of God's words had given him light, now that the over-ruling hand of God had secured His own appointment, Isaac was firm as a rock. The righteous may fall, but they cannot be utterly cast down.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Heb. 11:20). Jacob, the younger, had the precedency and principal blessing. Strikingly did this exemplify the high sovereignty of God. To take the younger, and leave the elder to perish in their ways, is a course the Lord has often followed, from the beginning of the world. Abel, the junior, was preferred before Cain. Shem was given the precedency over Japheth the elder (Gen. 10:21). Afterwards, Abraham, the younger, was taken to be God's favorite. Of Abraham's two sons, the older one, Ishmael, was passed by, and in Isaac was the Seed called. Later, David, who was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, was selected to be the man after God's own heart. And God still writes, as with a sunbeam in the course of His providence, that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

The "blessing" which Isaac pronounced upon Jacob was vastly superior to the portion allotted Esau, though if we look no deeper than the letter of the words which their father used, there appears to be very little difference between them. Unto Jacob Isaac said, "God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth; and plenty of corn and wine" (Gen. 27:28); what follows in verse 29 chiefly concerned his posterity. Unto Esau Isaac said, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above: and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother" (Gen. 27:39, 40). Apart from the younger son having the pre-eminence over the elder, wherein lay the peculiar excellence of his portion? If there had been nothing spiritual in the promise, it would have been no comfort to Jacob at all, for the temporal things mentioned were not his portion: as he acknowledged to Pharaoh, "few and evil have the days of the years of my life been" (Gen. 47:9).

What has just been before us supplies a notable example of

how the O.T. promises and prophecies are to be interpreted; not carnally, but mystically. That Jacob's portion far excelled Esau's is clear from Hebrews 12:17, where it is denominated, "the blessing." What that is was made clearer when Isaac repeated his benediction upon Jacob, saying, "And give the blessing of Abraham to thee and to thy seed" (Gen. 28:4). Here is the key which we need to unlock its meaning; as Galatians 3:9, 14, 29 clearly enough shows, the "blessing of Abraham" (into which elect Gentiles enter, through Christ) is purely a spiritual thing. Further proof that the same spiritual blessing which God promised to Abraham was also made over by Isaac to Jacob, is found in his words, "I have blessed him, and yea, and he shall be blessed" (Gen. 27:33), for Jehovah had employed the same language when blessing the father of all believers: "in blessing I will bless thee" (Gen. 22:17). To this may be added Isaac's "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (Gen. 27:29), being part of the very words God used to Abraham, see Genesis 12:2, 3.

Now in seeking to rightly understand the language of Isaac's prophecy, it must be recognized that (oftentimes) in the O.T. heavenly things were referred to in earthly terms, that spiritual blessings were set forth under the figure of material things. Due attention to this fact will render luminous many a passage. Such is the case here: under the emblems of the "dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth," three great spiritual blessings were intended. First, that he was to have a real relation to Christ, that he should be one of the progenitors of the Messiah—this was the chief favor and dignity bestowed upon "Abraham." It is in the light of this that we are to understand Genesis 27:29 as ultimately referring: "let the people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee," that is, to the top branch which should proceed from him—unto Christ, unto whom all men are commanded to render allegiance (Ps. 2:10-12).

Second, the next great blessing of "Abraham" was that he should be the priest that should continue the worship of God and teach the laws of God (Gen. 26:5). The bowing down of his brethren to Jacob (Gen. 27:29), was the owning of his priestly dignity. Herein also lay Jacob's blessing: to be in the church, and to have the church continued in his line. This was symbolically pointed to in "that thou mayest inherit the land" (Gen. 28:4). "The church is the ark of Noah, which is only preserved in the midst of floods and deep waters. The

church is the land of Goshen, which only enjoys the benefits of light, when there is nothing but darkness round about elsewhere. It is the fleece of Gideon, being wet with the dews of heaven, moistened with the influences of grace, when all the ground round about is dry" (Thomas Manton). As to how high is the honor of having the church continued in our line, the Spirit intimates in Genesis 10:21—Eber being the father of the Hebrews, who worshipped God.

Third, another privilege of Jacob above Esau was this, that he was taken into covenant with God: "the blessing of Abraham shall come upon thee." And what was that? This, "I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed" (Gen. 17:7). This is the greatest happiness of any people, to have God for their God—to be in covenant with Him. Thus when Noah came to pronounce blessings and curses on his children, by the spirit of prophecy, he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem" (Gen. 9:26). Afterward the same promise was made unto all Israel: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). So under the new covenant (the present administration of the everlasting covenant), he says, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people" (Heb. 8:10). To be a "God" to any, is to supply them with all good things, necessary for temporal or spiritual life.

The fulfillment of Isaac's prophetic blessing upon his sons was mainly in their descendants, rather than in their own persons: Jacob's spiritual children, Esau's natural. Concerning the latter, we would note two details. First, Isaac said to him "thou shalt serve thy brother"; second, "and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck" (Gen. 27:40). For long centuries there seemed no likelihood of the first part of this prediction being fulfilled, but eight hundred years later, David said, "over Edom will I cast out my shoe" (Ps. 60:8). which meant, he would bring the haughty descendants of Esau into a low and base state of subjection to him; which was duly accomplished—"all they of Edom become David's servants" (2 Sam. 8:14)! Though their subjugation continued for a lengthy period, yet, in the days of Jehoshaphat, we read, "In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves" (2 Kings 8:20)!

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to

come." This "blessing" was more than a dying father expressing good-will unto his sons: it was extraordinary: Isaac spoke as a prophet to God, announcing the future of his posterity, and the varied portions each should receive. As the mouthpiece of Jehovah, he did, by the spirit of prophecy, announce beforehand what should be the particular estate of each of his two sons; and so his words have been fulfilled. Though parents today are not thus supernaturally endowed to foretell the future of their children, nevertheless, it is their duty and privilege to search the Scriptures and ascertain what promises God has left to the righteous and to their seed, and plead them before Him.

But seeing Isaac thus spake by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, how can it be said that "by faith" he blessed his sons? This brings in the human side, and shows how he discharged his responsibility. He gathered together and rested upon the promises which God had made to him, both directly, and through Abraham and Rebekah. The principal ones we have already considered. He had been present when the Lord said unto his father what is found in Genesis 22:16-18, and he had himself been made the recipient of the Divine promises recorded in Genesis 26:2-4. And now, many years later, we find his heart resting upon what he had heard from God, firmly embracing His promises, and with unshaken confidence announcing the future estates of his distant posterity.

That Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau "concerning things to come," gives us a striking example of what is said in the opening verse of our chapter. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." "Abraham was now dead, and Isaac was expecting soon to be buried in the grave he had purchased in the Land given to him and his seed. There was nothing to be seen for faith to rest on; nothing that gave the smallest ground for hope; nothing to make it even probable (apart from what he had heard and believed) that his descendants, either Jacob or Esau, would ever possess the land which had been promised to them" (E.W.B.) There was no human probability at the time Isaac spake which could have been the basis of his calculations: all that he said issued from implicit faith in the bare Word of God.

This is the great practical lesson for us to learn here: the strength of Isaac's faith should stir us up to cry unto God for an increased measure thereof. With most precious confidence Isaac

disposed of Canaan as if he already had the peaceable possession of it. Yet, in fact, he owned not an acre of that Land, and had no human right to anything there save a burying-place. Moreover, at the time he prophesied there was a famine in Canaan, and he was an exile in Gerah. "Let people serve thee, and let nations bow down to thee" (Gen. 27:29) , would, to one that viewed only the outward case of Isaac, seem like empty words. Ah, my brethren, we too ought to be as certain of the blessings to come, which God has promised, as if they were present, even though we see no apparent likelihood of them.

It may be objected against what has been said above, that, from the account which is supplied in Genesis 27, Isaac "blessed" Jacob in ignorance rather than "by faith." To this it may be replied, first, the object of faith is always God Himself, and the ground on which it rests is His revealed will. So in Isaac's case, his faith was fixed upon the covenant God and was exercised upon His sure Word, and this was by no means negatived by his mistaking Jacob for Esau. Second, it illustrates the fact that the faith of God's people is usually accompanied by some infirmity: in Isaac's case, his partiality for Esau. Third, after he discovered the deception which had been played upon him, he made no effort to recall the blessing pronounced upon the disguised Jacob—sweetly acquiescing unto the Divine Sovereignty—but confirming it; and though with tears Esau sought to change his mind, he could not.

Here too we behold the strength of Isaac's faith: as soon as he perceived the providential hand of God crossing his natural affections, instead of murmuring and rebelling, he yielded and submitted to the Lord. This is ever the work of true faith: it makes the soul yield to God's will against our fleshly inclinations, as also against the bent of our own reason. Faith knows that God is so great, so powerful, so glorious, that His commands must be obeyed. As it was with Abraham, so in the case of Isaac: faith viewed the precepts as well as the promise; it moves us to tread the path of obedience. May our faith be more and more evidenced by walking in those good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Hebrews 11:21

Chapter 68 - The Faith of Jacob

It has been well said that "Though the grace of faith is of universal use throughout our whole lives, yet it is especially so when we come to die. Faith has its great work to do at the last, to help believers to finish well, to die to the Lord, so as to honor Him, by patience, hope, and joy, so as to leave a witness behind them of the truth of God's Word and the excellency of His ways, for the conviction and establishment of all that attend them in their dying moments" (Matthew Henry). God is greatly glorified when His people leave this world with their flag flying at full mast: when the spirit triumphs over the flesh, when the world is consciously and gladly left behind for Heaven. For this faith must be in exercise.

It is not without good reason, we may be sure, that in the description which the Holy Spirit has given us of the life of faith in Hebrews 11, He has furnished us with no less than three examples—and these in successive verses—of the actings of faith in the final crisis and conflict. We believe that, among other reasons, God would hereby assure His trembling and doubting children, that He who has begun a good work in them, will most certainly sustain and complete the same; that He who has in His sovereignty committed this precious grace to their hearts, will not suffer it to languish when its support is most sorely needed; that He who has enabled His people to exercise faith during the vigor of life, will not withdraw His quickening power during the weakness of death.

As the writer grows older, he is saddened by discovering how very little is now being given out, either orally or in written ministry, for the instruction and comfort of God's people concerning the dying of Christians. The devil is not inactive in seeking to strike terror into the hearts of God's people, and knowing this, it is the bounden duty of Christ's servants to expose the groundlessness and hollowness of Satan's lies. Not a few have been deterred from so doing by heeding the mistaken notion that, for a Christian to think of and prepare for death is dishonoring to Christ, and inconsistent with

the "imminency" of His coming. But such a notion is refuted in our present passage. Let it be carefully considered that, when in Hebrews 12:1 the Holy Spirit bids us "run with patience the race that is set before us," He bases that exhortation on the fact that we are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," the reference being unto the men of God who are before in Hebrews 11, who all "died in faith" (verse 13).

A God-given and a God-sustained faith is not only sufficient to enable the feeblest saint to overcome the solicitations of the flesh, the attractions of the world, and the temptations of Satan, but it is also able to give him a triumphant passage through death. This is one of the prominent things set forth in this wondrous and blessed chapter. In Hebrews 11 the Holy Spirit has set out at length the works, the achievements, the fruits, the glories, of faith, and not the least of them is its power to support the soul, comfort the heart, illumine the understanding, and direct the will, in the last earthly struggle. While Hebrews 11:20, 21 and 22 have this in common, yet each contributes its own distinctive feature. In the case of Isaac, we see a dying faith triumphing over the affections of the flesh; in the case of Jacob, dying faith overcoming the interference of man; and in Joseph, scorning the worthless pageantry of the world.

Of old Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. 23:10): well might he wish to do so. The writer has not a shadow of doubt that every Christian who has, in the main current of his life, walked with God, his last hours on earth (normally speaking, for we consider not here the exceptional cases of those taken Home suddenly) are the brightest and most blissful of all. Proverbs 4:18, of itself, is fully sufficient to warrant this thought. The Christian is not always permitted to bear testimony of this so as to be intelligent unto those surrounding him, but even though his poor body be convulsed with pain, and physical unconsciousness set in, yet the soul cutting adrift from its earthly moorings, is then blest with a sight and sense of his precious Redeemer such as he never had before (Acts 7:55).

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace" (Ps. 37:37). A peaceful death has concluded the troublous life of many a good man. As the late C. H. Spurgeon said on this verse, "With believers it may rain in the morning, thunder at midday, and pour torrents in the afternoon, but it must clear up ere

the sun go down." Most aptly do his words apply to the case of Jacob. A stormy passage indeed was his, but the waters were smooth as he entered the port. Cloudy and dark were many of the hours of his life, but the sunset bathed it with radiant splendor at its close.

"By faith Jacob when he was a dying" (Heb. 11:21). Ah, but to "die" by faith, we must needs live by faith. And a life of faith is not like the shining of the sun on a calm and clear day, its rays meeting with no resistance from the atmosphere; rather is it more like the sun rising upon a foggy morning, its rays struggling to pierce through and dispel the opposing mists. Jacob walked by faith, but the exercise thereof encountered many a struggle, and had to fight hard for each victory. In spite of all his faults and failings (and each of us is just as full of the same), Jacob dearly prized his interest in the everlasting covenant, trusted in God, and highly esteemed His promises. It is a very faulty and one-sided estimate of his character which fails to take these things into account. The old nature was strong within him; yes, and so too was the new.

Though his infirmities led Jacob to employ unlawful means for the procuring of it, yet his heart valued the "birthright," which profane Esau despised (Gen. 25). Though he yielded unto the foolish suggestions of his mother to deceive Isaac, yet his faith covetly eyed the promises of God. Though there may have been a measure of fleshly bargaining in his vow, yet Jacob was anxious for the Lord to be his God (Gen. 28:21). Though he stole away from Laban in fear, when his father-in-law overtook him, he glorified God in the tribute he paid Him (Gen. 31:53). Though he was terrified at Esau, nevertheless he sought unto the Lord, pleaded His promises (Gen. 32:12), and obtained an answer of peace. Though later he groveled at the feet of his brother, in the sequel we find him prevailing with God (Gen. 32:28). Equally with Abraham and Isaac, "by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents" (Heb. 11:9).

But it was during the closing days of his life that Jacob's faith shone most brightly. When giving permission for Benjamin to accompany his other sons on their second trip to Egypt, he said "God Almighty (or "God the Sufficient One") give you mercy before the man" (Gen. 43:14). This was the title under which the Lord had blessed Abraham (Gen. 17:1), as it was also the one Isaac employed when he blessed Jacob (Gen. 28:3): thus in using it here, we see how

Jacob rested on the covenant promise. Arriving in Egypt, the aged patriarch was presented unto its mighty monarch. Blessed is it to see how he conducted himself: instead of cringing before the ruler of the greatest empire of the old world, we are told that "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (Gen. 47:7); with becoming dignity he conducted himself as a child of the King of kings (Heb. 7:7), and carried himself as became an ambassador of the Most High.

"By faith Jacob when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph." This takes us back to what is recorded in Genesis 48. What is found there is quite distinct from what is said in the next chapter, where Jacob is seen as God's prophet announcing the future of all his twelve sons. But here he is concerned only with Joseph and his two sons. Before considering the particular detail which our text treats of, let us note the sentence which immediately precedes it. "And he blessed Joseph" (Gen. 48:15): in this we may admire the overruling hand of God, and also find here the key to what follows.

In Deuteronomy 21:17 we read, "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." It was the right of the firstborn to have a double portion, and this is exactly what we find Jacob bestowing upon Joseph, for both Ephraim and Manasseh were allotted a distinct tribal part and place in the promised inheritance. This, by right, belonged unto Joseph, though the Devil had tried to cheat him out of it, using Laban to deceive Jacob by substituting Leah in Rebekah's place, and Joseph was her firstborn; and now by the providence of God the primogeniture is restored to him. So too God permitted Reuben to sin so that the way might be open for this: "Now the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn) but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph" (1 Chron. 5:1).

Earlier in this interview, Jacob had said, "And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt, before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine" (Gen. 48:5). Those two sons of Joseph had been borne to him by an Egyptian wife, and in a foreign land, but now they were to be adopted and incorporated into the body of the holy seed. For note, when Jacob blessed them he said, "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of

my fathers, Abraham and Isaac" (verse 16). By that blessing he sought to draw their hearts away from Egypt and their kinsfolk there, that they might be annexed to the church and share with the people of God.

"By faith Jacob when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph." In this case the R.V. is more accurate: "blessed each of the sons of Joseph," for their blessing was not collective, but a distinctive and discriminating one. In fact the leading feature of the dying Jacob's faith is most particularly to be seen at this very point. When Joseph brought his two sons before their grandfather to receive his patriarchal blessing, he placed Manasseh the elder, to his right hand, and Ephraim the younger to his left. His object in this was that Manasseh might receive the first and superior portion. Right there it was that the faith of Jacob was most tested. At this time Joseph was governor over all Egypt, and second only to Pharaoh himself in authority and power; moreover he was Jacob's favorite son, yet the dying patriarch had now to withstand him.

"And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn" (Gen. 48:14). Herein we behold the manner in which the blessing was bestowed. Once more the younger, by the appointment of God, was preferred before the elder, for the Lord distributes His favors as He pleases, saying "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with Mine own?" (Matthew 20:15). Unto the high sovereignty of God Jacob here submissively bowed. It was not a thing of chance that he crossed his hands, for the Hebrew of "guiding his hands wittingly" is "made his hands to understand." It was the understanding of faith, for his physical eyes were too dim to see what he was doing—true faith is ever opposed to sight! Note how the Holy Spirit emphasizes the fact that it was "Isaac" (and not "Jacob") who did this.

"And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk" (Gen. 48:15). Very blessed is this. Despite his physical decay, there was no abatement of his spiritual strength: notwithstanding the weakness of old age, he abode firm in faith and in the vigorous exercise of it. Here in the verse before us, we behold Jacob recognizing and asserting the covenant which Jehovah had made with his fathers. This is the very

life of faith: to lay hold of, draw strength from, and walk in the light of the everlasting covenant, for it is the foundation of all our blessings, the charter of our inheritance, the guaranty of our eternal glory and bliss. He who keeps it in view will have a happy deathbed, a peaceful end, (and a God-honoring exit from this world of sin and suffering.

"The God which fed me all my life long unto this day" (Gen. 48:15). As Jacob had made a solemn acknowledgment of the spiritual blessing which he had received by virtue of the everlasting covenant, so he also owned the temporal mercies of which he had been the favored recipient. "It was a work of faith to retain a precious thankful remembrance of Divine providence in a constant provision of all needful temporal supplies, from first to last, during the whole course of his life" (John Owen). As it is an act of faith to cordially consent unto the dealings of God with us in a providential way, so it is a fruit of faith to make a confession by the mouth concerning Him. Note: God is honored before those attending Him when a dying saint bears testimony unto His faithfulness in having supplied all his need.

"The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads" (Gen. 48:16). "He reflects on all the hazards, trials and evils that befell him, and the exercise of his faith in them all. Now all his dangers were past, all his evils conquered, all his fears removed, he retains by faith a sense of the goodness and kindness of God in rescuing him out of them all" (John Owen). "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee" (Deut. 8:2): as the children of Israel were called upon to do this at the close of their wilderness journey, so we cannot be more profitably employed in the closing hours of our earthly pilgrimage than by recalling and reviewing that grace which delivered us from so many dangers known and unknown.

"And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Gen. 48:16). Jacob was not ambitious for a continuance of their present greatness in Egypt, but desired for them the blessings of the covenant. Joseph could have left to his sons a rich patrimony in Egypt, but he brought them to Jacob to receive his benediction. Ah, the baubles of this world are nothing in comparison with the blessings of Zion: see Psalm 128:5; 134:3; 133:3. The

spiritual blessings of the Redeemer far exceed in value the temporal mercies of the Creator: it was the former which Joseph coveted for his sons, and which Jacob now prophetically bestowed.

"And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; and he held up his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said unto his father, not so, my father; for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head" (Gen. 48:17, 18). Here we see the will of man asserting itself, which, when left to itself, is ever opposed to God. Joseph had his wishes concerning the matter, and did not hesitate to express them; though, be it noted unto his credit, he meekly acquiesced at the finish.

"And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it" (Gen. 48:19). It was at this point that Jacob's faith shone most brightly; the repeated "I know it" marks the great strength of his faith. He had "heard" from God (Rom. 10:17), he believed God, he submitted to God. Jacob was no more to be influenced by "the will of man" here, than in the preceding verse Isaac was by "the will of the flesh"; faith overcame both. Learn, my reader, that sometimes faith has to cross the wish and will of a loved one!

Plainly it was "by faith" that the dying Israel blessed each of the sons of Joseph. Certainly it was not by sight. "To 'sight' what could be more unlikely than that these two young Egyptian princes, for such they were, should ever forsake Egypt, the land of their birth, and migrate into Canaan? What more improbable than that they should 'each' become a separate tribe? What more un-looked for, than that, of these two, the younger should be exalted above the elder, both in importance and number?" (E.W.B.)

"He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations" (Gen. 48:19). Not only does God make a great difference between the elect and the reprobate, but He does not deal alike with His own children, neither in temporals nor spirituals. There are some of His favored people to whom God manifests Himself more familiarly, grants them more liberal supplies of His grace, and more plentiful comforts -- there was a specially favored three among the twelve apostles. Some Christians have more opportunities to glorify God than others, higher privileges of service, greater abilities and gifts -- the "talents" were not distributed

equally: one had five, another three, another one. But let us not murmur: all have more than they can improve.

"And worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Heb. 11:21). There is some room for question as to what incident the apostle is here referring to. Some think that (like Moses did "exceeding fear and quake": Hebrews 12:21) it is entirely a N.T. revelation; others (the writer included) regard it as alluding to what is recorded in Genesis 47:31. The only difficulty in connection with this view is, that here we read Jacob "worshipped upon the top of his staff," there that "he bowed himself upon the bed's head." Concerning this variation we agree with Owen that "he did both, namely, bow towards the head of the bed, and at the same time lean on his staff, as we are assured by comparing the Divine writers together."

The occasion of Jacob's "worship" was as follows: "And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: And he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place. And he said, I will do as thou hast said" (Gen. 47:29, 30). It was far more than a sentimental whim which moved the patriarch to desire that his body be interred in the holy land: it was the working of faith, a blessed exhibition of his confidence in God.

It was not the pomp and pageantry of his burial which concerned Jacob, but the place of it which he was so solicitous about. Not in Egypt among idolators, must his bones be laid to rest, for with them he cared not to have any fellowship in life; and now he desired no proximity unto them in death—he would show that God's people are a separated people. No, it was in the burying-place of his fathers he wished to be laid. First, to show forth his union with Abraham and Isaac in the covenant. Second, to express his faith in the promises of God, which concerned Canaan, and not Egypt. Third, to draw off the minds of his descendants from a continuance in Egypt: setting before them an example that they should think of returning to the promised land at the proper time, and thereby confirming them in the belief of possessing it. Fourth, to signify he would go before them, and, as it were, take possession of the land on their behalf. Fifth, to intimate that Canaan was a type of Heaven, the

"Better Country" (Heb. 11:16), the eternal Resting-place of all the people of God.

The asking of Joseph to place his hand under his thigh, was a gesture in swearing (Gen. 24:2, 3), as the raising of the hand now is with us. It was not that Jacob doubted his son's veracity, but it signified the eagerness of his entreaty, and the intensity of his mind about the matter: what an important thing it was to him. No doubt it was also designed to forestall any objection which Pharaoh might make after his death: see Gen. 50:5, 6. Jacob was in bed at the time, but gathering together his little remaining strength, he raised himself to sit upright, and then bowing his body, and so that it might be supported, he leaned upon his staff, worshipping God.

The Holy Spirit's mention here of Jacob's reverent gesture in worshipping God, intimates to us that it well becomes a worshipper of the Most High to manifest the inward devotion of the soul by a fitting posture of the body. God has redeemed both, and He is to be honored by both: 1 Corinthians 6:20. Shall we serve God with that which costs us nothing? Sitting or lying at prayer savors more of sloth and carelessness, than of reverence and zeal. Carnal men, in pursuit of their fleshly lusts, can weary and waste the body; shall Christians shelter behind every inconvenience and excuse? Christ exposed His body to the utmost suffering, shall not His love constrain us to deny selfish ease and sloth!

Having secured the promise from Joseph that his will should be carried out, Jacob bowed before God in worship, for now he realized the Lord was making good the promise recorded in Genesis 46:4. In his great weakness he had bowed toward his bed's head so as to adore God, completing now his representation of reverence and faith by leaning upon the top of his staff. In that emblematic action he signified his complete dependence upon God, testified to his condition as a pilgrim in the earth, and emphasized his weariness of the world and his readiness to part from it. He praised God for all He had done for him, and for the approaching prospect of everlasting bliss. Blessed is it to find that the Holy Spirit's final word about Jacob in Scripture (Heb. 11:21) depicts him in the act of worship!

Hebrews 11:22

Chapter 69 - The Faith of Joseph

At the early age of seventeen Joseph was carded away into a foreign country, into a heathen land. There he remained for many years surrounded by idolaters, and during all that time he, probably, never came into contact with a single child of God. Moreover, in those days there was no Bible to read, for none of God's Word had then been committed to writing. Yet amid all sorts of temptations and trials, he remained true unto the Lord. Thirteen years in prison did not embitter him; being made lord over Egypt did not spoil him; evil examples all around, did not corrupt him. O the mighty power of Divine grace to preserve its favored objects. But let the reader carefully bear in mind that, in his earliest years, Joseph had received a godly training! O how this ought to encourage Christian parents: do your part in faithfully teaching the children, and with God's blessing, it will abide with them, even though they move into a foreign land.

It may strike some of our readers that the apostle made a strange selection here from the remarkable history of Joseph. No reference is given unto his faithfulness to God in declaring what He had made known to him (Gen. 37:5), his chastity (Gen. 39:10), his patience under affliction (Ps. 105:18, 19), his wisdom and prudence (Gen. 39:22; 47:14), his fear of God (Gen. 42:18); his compassion (Gen. 42:24), his overcoming evil with good (Gen. 45:10), his reverence to his father, and that when he was advanced unto outward dignity above him (Gen. 48:12), his obedience to his father (Gen. 47:31); instead, the whole of his memorable life is passed over, and we are introduced to the final scene. But this seeming difficulty is at once removed if we bear in mind the Spirit's scope in this chapter, namely, to encourage the fearful and wavering Hebrews, by bringing before them striking examples of the efficacy and sufficiency of faith to carry its favored possessor safely through every difficulty, and ultimately conduct him into the promised inheritance.

Not only was there a particular reason in the case of those

who first received this Epistle, why the Holy Spirit should conduct them unto the expiring moments of Joseph, but there is also a wider purpose why (in this description of the whole Life of Faith) He should do so. Faith is a grace which honours God and stands its possessor in good stead, in death as well as life. The worldling may appear to prosper, and his journey through life seem to be smooth and easy, but how does he fare in the supreme crisis? what support is there for his heart when God calls him to pass out of time into eternity? "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" Ignorance may exclude terror, and sottishness may still the conscience; but there can be no true peace, no firm confidence, no triumphant joy for those out of Christ. Only he can die worshipping and glorifying God for His promises who possesses genuine faith.

If the kind providence of God preserves his faculties unto the end, a Christian ought not to be passive in death, and die like a beast. No, this is the last time he can do any thing for God on earth, and therefore he should take a fresh and firm hold of His everlasting covenant, "ordered in all things and sure," going over in his mind the amazing grace of the Triune God toward him; the Father, in having from the beginning, chosen him unto salvation; the Son for having obeyed, suffered and died in his room and stead; the Holy Spirit for having sought him out when dead in sins, quickened him into newness of life, shed abroad the love of God in his heart, and put a new song in his mouth. He should review the faithfulness and goodness of God toward him all through his pilgrimage. He should rest on the promises, and view the glorious future awaiting him. Thereby, praise and thanksgiving will fill his soul and mouth, and God will be greatly honored before the onlookers.

When faith is active during the dying hours of a saint, not only is his own heart spiritually upheld and comforted, but God is honored and others are confirmed. A carnal man cannot speak well of the world when he comes to pass through the dark valley; no, he dares not commend his wordly life to others. But a godly man can speak well of God, and commend His covenant to others. So it was with Jacob (Gen. 48:15, 16). So it was with Joshua: "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are

come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh. 23:14).

So was it also with Joseph. He could have left to his sons nobility of blood, a rich patrimony in Egypt, but he brought them to his father to receive his blessing (Gen. 48:12). And what was that? To invest them with the right of entering into the visible privileges of the covenant. Ah, to Joseph, the riches of Egypt were nothing in comparison with the blessings of Zion. And so again now: when his hours on earth were numbered, Joseph thinks not of the temporal position of honor which he had occupied so long, but was engaged only with the things of God and the promised inheritance. See here the power of a godly example: Joseph had witnessed the last acts of his father, and now he follows in his steps. The good examples of superiors and seniors are of great force unto those who look up to them—how careful they should be, then, of their conduct! Let us seek to emulate that which is praiseworthy in our betters: Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 13:7.

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (verse 22). First, let us observe the time when Joseph's faith was here exercised. It was during his closing hours upon earth. Most of his long life had been spent in Egypt, and during its later stages, had been elevated unto a dizzy height; for as Acts 7:10 tells us, he was made "governor" or lord over Egypt, and over all Pharaoh's house. But neither the honors nor the luxuries which Joseph received while in the land of exile, made that holy man forget the promises of God, nor bound his soul to the earth. His mind was engaged in higher things than the perishing baubles of this world. Learn them, my reader, it is only as our hearts ascend to heaven that we are able to look down with contempt upon that which this world prizes so much.

From the case of Joseph we may see that earthly honor and wealth do not in themselves injure: where there is a gracious heart to manage them, they can be employed with advantage and used to God's glory. Many examples may be cited in proof of this. God has ever had a few of His saints even in Caesar's "household" (Phil. 4:22). Material things are God's gifts, and so must be improved unto His praise. There is as much faith, yea more, in moderating the affections under a full estate, as there is in depending upon God for

supplies when we have nothing. Nevertheless, to learn "how to abound" (Phil. 4:12) is a hard lesson. To keep the mind stayed upon God and the heart from settling down here, calls for much exercise of soul; therefore are we exhorted "if riches increase, set not your hearts upon them" (Ps. 62:10)—but be thankful for them, and seek to use them unto God's honor.

No, the poor do not have such temptations to overcome as do the rich. The poor are driven to depend upon God: they have no other alternative save abject despair. But there is more choice to those who have plenty: their great danger is to lose sight of the Giver and become immersed in His gifts. Not so with Joseph: to him Egypt was nothing in comparison with Canaan. Then let us seek grace to be of his spirit: true greatness of mind is to count the highest things of earth as nothing when weighed against the things of Heaven. It is a great mercy when the affluence of temporal things does not take the heart off the promises, but for this there has to be a constant crying unto Him to quicken our spiritual sensibilities, keep us in close communication with Himself, wean us from things below.

But neither the riches nor the honors of Egypt could secure Joseph from death, nor did they make him unmindful or afraid of it. The time had arrived when he saw that his end was at hand, and he met it with a confident spirit. And thus it should be with us. But in order to do this we must be all our lifetime preparing for that hour. Reader, there can be no dissembling then. Allow me to ask: Is your soul truly yielded up to God? Do you hold this world with a light hand? Are God's promises your daily food? Life is held by a very uncertain tenure. Unless the Lord returns first, death will be the last great enemy with which you have to contend, and you will need to have on all your armor. If you have not on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, what will you do in the swellings of Jordan, when Satan is often permitted to make his fiercest attack?

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel." Let us consider next the strength of his faith. It will be noted by the careful reader that the margin gives an alternative rendering, namely, "By faith Joseph, when he died, remembered the departing of the children of Israel": the Greek will allow of either translation, and personally we believe that the

fulness of the Spirit's words requires that both meanings be kept before us. That which is in view here is very striking and blessed. The word "remembered" shows that Joseph's mind was now engaged with the promise which the Lord had made to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:14-16. The alternative translation "he made mention of the departing of the children of Israel," signifies that Joseph testifies his own faith and hope in the sure words of the living God.

At the end of Joseph's long and memorable career his thoughts were occupied not so much with what God had wrought for him, but with what He had promised unto His people: in other words, he was dwelling not upon the past, but with that which was yet future. In his heart were the "things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1)! More than two hundred years had passed since Jehovah had spoken what is recorded in Genesis 15. Part of the prediction which He there made, had been fulfilled; but to carnal reason there seemed very little prospect that the remainder of it would come to pass. First, God had announced that the seed of Abraham should be "a stranger in the land that is not theirs" (Gen. 15:13), which had been confirmed when Jacob carried all his household down into Egypt. Second, God had declared the descendants of Abraham should "serve" the Egyptians and "they shall afflict them four hundred years" (Ex. 15:13): but to outward sight, that now appeared most unlikely. The posterity of the patriarchs had been given favor in Pharaoh's eyes (Gen. 45:16-18), the "best" of the land was set apart for their use (Gen. 47:6), there they "multiplied exceedingly" (Gen. 47:27), and so great was the respect of the Egyptians that they "mourned" for Jacob seventy days (Gen. 50:3). Joseph himself was their great benefactor and deliverer from the famine: why, then, should his descendants be hated and oppressed by them? Ah, faith does not reason, but believes.

Third, God had declared that He would judge the Egyptians for their afflicting of His people (Ex. 15:14), which was fulfilled in the awful plagues recorded in the early chapters of Exodus. Finally, God had promised "and afterward shall they come out with great substance . . . in the fourth generation they shall come hither (into Canaan) again" (Ex. 15:14, 16). It was unto this that the heart of Joseph was now looking forward, and nothing but real spiritual faith could have counted upon the same. If, after his death, the Hebrews

(without a leader) were to be sorely afflicted, and that for a lengthy season; if they were to be reduced unto helpless slaves, who could reasonably hope that all this should be followed by their leaving the land of Egypt with "great substance," and returning to the land of Canaan? Ah, FAITH is fully assured that God's promises will be fulfilled, no matter how long they may be delayed.

Faith is gifted with long-distant sight, and therefore is it able to look beyond all the hills and mountains of difficulty unto the shining horizon of the Divine promises. Consequently, faith is blessed with patience, and calmly awaits the destined hour for God to intervene and act: therefore does it heed that word, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Hab. 2:3). Though the Hebrews were to lie under Egyptian bondage for a long season, Joseph had not a doubt but that the Lord would, in His appointed time, bring them forth with a high hand. God's delays, dear reader, are not to deny our prayers and mock our hopes, but are for the disciplining of our hearts—to subdue our impatience, which wants things in our own way and time; to quicken us to call more earnestly upon Him, and to fit us for receiving His mercies when they are given.

God often defers His help till the very last moment. It was so with Abraham offering up Isaac; only when his son had been bound to the altar, and he had taken the knife into his hand to slay him, did God intervene. It was so with Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13). It was so with the disciples in the storm: "the ship was covered with the waves," before Christ calmed the sea (Matthew 8:24-26). It was so with Peter in prison; only a very few hours before his execution did God free him (Acts 12:6-8). So, too, God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform, and often in a manner quite contrary to outward likelihood. The history of Joseph affords a striking example. He was first made a slave in Egypt, and this in order to his being made ruler over it—who would have thought that the prison was the way to the court! So it was with his descendants: when their tale of bricks was doubled and the straw withheld, who would have looked for deliverance! Yes, God's ways are strange to flesh and blood: often He allows error to arise to clear the Truth; bondage often makes way for liberty; persecution and affliction have often proved blessings in disguise.

"And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). How plainly and how blessedly does this bring out the strength of Joseph's faith; There was no hesitancy or doubt: he was fully assured that God cannot lie, and that He would, "surely" make good His word. Equally certain is it that God's promises unto us will be fulfilled: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Therefore may the dying saint exclaim "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). So too our faith may look beyond the grave unto the glorious resurrection, and say with David, "my flesh also shall rest in hope" (Ps. 16:9).

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel." Let us now take note of the breadth of his faith. A true Christian is known by his affection for Zion. The cause of Christ upon earth is dearer to him than the prosperity or disposition of his personal estate. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). Thus it was with Joseph; before he gave commandment concerning his bones, he was first concerned with the future exodus of Israel and their settlement in Canaan! How different with the empty professor, who is ruled by self-love, and has no heart for the people of God. He may be interested in the progress of his own denomination, but he has no concern for the Church at large. Far otherwise is it with the genuine saint: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5, 6). So Joseph, at the very time of his death, was engaged with the future happiness of God's people.

Beautiful indeed is it to see the dying Joseph unselfishly thinking about the welfare of others. O may God deliver the writer and the reader from a narrow heart and a contracted spirit. True faith not only desires that it shall be well with our own soul, but with the Church at large. Behold another lovely example of this in the case of the dying daughter-in-law of Eli, the high priest: "And she said, The glory of God is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken" (1 Sam. 4:22)—not my father-in-law is dead, not my husband has been slain, but "the glory is departed." But most blessed of all is the case

of Him of whom Joseph was here a type. As our precious Savior drew near the Cross, yea, on the very night of His betrayal, it is recorded that "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1). The interests of God's people were ever upon His heart.

Let us note how another aspect of the breadth of true faith was illustrated by Joseph. Faith not only believes the promises which God has given to His saints individually, but also lays hold of those given to the Church collectively. There have been many seasons when the cause of Christ on earth has languished sorely; when it has been in a low state spiritually; when eminent leaders had been all called home, and when fierce persecution broke out against the little flock which they had left behind. Even so, they still had that sure word, "Upon this Rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). In all ages the enemy has sought to destroy the people of God, but the Lord has defeated his designs and rendered his opposition ineffectual. O for a faith to now lay hold of this promise, "When the Enemy shall come in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa. 59:19).

"And gave commandment concerning his bones." The reference here is to what is recorded in Genesis 50:25, "And Joseph took an oath saying God will surely visit you, and ye will carry up my bones from hence." This brings out another characteristic of his faith: the public avowal of it. Joseph's faith was no secret thing, hidden in his own heart, about which others knew nothing. No, though he had occupied for so long an eminent situation, he was not ashamed to now let others know that he found his support and confidence in the promises of God. He had been of great dignity and authority among the Egyptians, and his fame for wisdom and prudence was great among the nations. It was therefore the more necessary for him to openly renounce all alliance with them, lest posterity think he had become an Egyptian. Had he liked and loved the Egyptians, he had wanted his tomb among them; but his heart was elsewhere.

"And gave commandment concerning his bones." This was not a superstitious request, as though it made any difference whether our bodies be deposited in "consecrated" ground or no. Rather it was: First, to exhibit his belief in the promises of Jehovah; though

he could not go in person into the land of Canaan, yet he would have his bones carried thither, and thus symbolically (as it were) take possession of it. Second, to confirm the hope of his brethren, and thus draw their hearts from the goodly portion in Goshen. He would sharpen the desire of the Nation to earnestly aspire after the promised redemption when he was dead. Third, to establish a public memorial, by which on all occasions, his posterity might call to mind the truth of the promise.

Proof that this dying request of Joseph's was designed as a public memorial is found in noting a significant change between the wording of Genesis 50:24 and Genesis 50:25. In the former, Joseph "said unto his brethren"; in the latter, he "took an oath of the children of Israel" (cf. Exodus 13:19): by the heads of their tribes, he brought the whole people into this engagement—binding on after generations. Thus Joseph established this monument of his being of the favored seed of Abraham. Joseph's requesting his brethren to "take an oath" illustrates the power of example: cf. Genesis 47:31! He made reference to his "bones" rather than to his "body," because he knew another two centuries must yet run their course. The whole transaction was an emblematic pledge of the communion of saints. Though the Christian at death be cut off from his loved ones on earth, he is introduced unto the spirits of the just in Heaven.

Hebrews 11:23

Chapter 70 - The Faith of Moses' Parents

"By faith Moses when he was born, was hid three months of his parents." A considerable length of time elapsed between what is recorded in the preceding verse and what is here before us. That interval is bridged by what is found in Exodus 1. There we see a marked revolution taking place in the lot of the Hebrews. In the days of Joseph, the Egyptians had been kind, giving them the land of Goshen to dwell in. Then followed another dynasty, and a king arose who "knew not Joseph"—probably a foreigner who had conquered Egypt. This new monarch was a tyrant of the worst kind, who sorely oppressed the descendants of Abraham. So subject to drastic changes are the fortunes both of individuals and nations: hence the force of those words, "In the days of prosperity be joyful, in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

The policy of the new ruler of Egypt quickly became apparent: "And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies" (Ex. 1:9, 10). Ah, but though "there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21). So it proved here, for "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew" (Ex. 1:12). Yes, "the Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:10, 11).

Next, the king of Egypt gave orders to the midwives that every male child of the Hebrews should be slain at birth (Ex. 1:15, 16). But all the laws which men may make against the promises that God has given to His church, are doomed to certain failure. God had promised unto Abraham a numerous "seed" (Gen. 13:15), and had

declared to Jacob, "fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 46:3); as well, then, might Pharaoh attempt to stop the sun from shining as prevent the growth of the children of Israel. Therefore do we read, "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive" (Ex. 1:17).

Refusing to accept defeat, "Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" (Ex. 1:22). Now that the execution of this barbarous edict had been entrusted unto his own people, no doubt Pharaoh imagined that success was fully assured for his evil design: yet it was at this very season that God brought to the birth the one who was to emancipate his suffering nation. "How blind are poor sinful mortals, in all their contrivances against the church of God. When they think all things secure, and that they shall not fail of their end, that their counsels are laid so deep as not to be blown upon, their power so uncontrollable and the way in which they are engaged so effectual, that God Himself can hardly deliver it out of their hands; He that sits on high laughs them to scorn, and with an Almighty facility lays provisions for the deliverance of His church, and for their ultimate ruin" (John Owen).

"And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive. And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi, and the woman conceived, and bare a son" (Ex. 1:22 and 2:1, 2). Amram and Jochebed refused to be intimidated by the cruel commandment of the king, and acted as though no injunction had been issued by him. Were they reckless and foolish? No indeed, they took their orders from a far higher authority than any earthly potentate. The fear of the Lord was upon them, and therefore were they delivered from that fear of man which bringeth a snare. In covenant relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this godly couple from the tribe of Levi allowed not the wrath of man to disrupt their domestic happiness.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents." "It is the faith of Moses' parents that is here celebrated. But because it is mentioned principally to introduce the discourse of himself and his faith, and also that which is spoken belongs unto his honour; it is thus peculiarly expressed. He saith not 'By faith the

parents of Moses when he was born, hid him,' but 'By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents'; that is, by the faith of the parents who hid him" (John Owen). Ah, here is the explanation of the conduct of Amram and Jochebed: it was "by faith" they acted: it was a living, supernatural, spiritual faith which sustained their hearts in this crisis, and kept them "in perfect peace" (Isa. 26:3). Nothing will so quieten the mind and still its fears as a real trusting in the Lord of hosts.

The birth of Moses occurred during the very height and fury of the attack that was being made upon the infant males of the Hebrews. Herein we may discover a striking foreshadowment of the attempt which was made upon the life of the Christ-child, when, in his efforts to slay Him, Herod gave orders that all the children in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof from two years old and under, should be slain (Matthew 2:16). Many a typical representation of the principal events in the life of the Redeemer is to be found in the Old Testament, and at scores of points did Moses in particular prefigure the great Deliverer of His people. It is a deeply interesting line of study, which we commend to our readers, to go over the history of Moses and note down the many details in which he pictured the Lord Jesus.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." It seems clear from the final clause that Pharaoh had either given orders that the Hebrews should notify his officers whenever a male child was born unto them, or that they themselves should throw him into the river. Instead of complying with this atrocious enactment, the parents of Moses concealed their infant for three months, which supplies us with a clear example of "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). It is true that the Lord requires His people to "be in subjection unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1), but this holds good only so long as the "higher powers" (human governors) require the Christian to do nothing which God has forbidden, or prohibit nothing which God has commanded. The inferior authority must always give place before the superior. As this is a principle of great importance practically, and one concerning which confusion exists in some quarters, let us amplify a little.

Holy Scripture must never be made to contradict itself: one

of its precepts must never be pressed so far as to nullify another; each one is to be interpreted and applied in harmony with the general analogy of faith, and in the light of the modifications which the Spirit Himself has given. For example; children are required to honor their parents, yet Ephesians 6:1 shows that their obedience is to be "in the Lord"; if a parent required something directly opposed unto Holy Writ, then he is not to be obeyed. Christian wives are required by God to submit themselves unto their husbands, and that, "in everything" (Eph. 5:24), obeying them (1 Pet. 3:6); nevertheless, their subjection is to be of the same character as that of the Church unto Christ (Eph. 5:24); and inasmuch as He never demands anything from the Church which is evil, so He does not require the wife to obey injunctions which are positively harmful—if a thoughtless husband should insist on that which would be highly injurious to his wife's health, she is to refuse him. Submission does not mean slavery!

Now the same modification we have pointed out above obtains in connection with the exhortations of Romans 13:1-7. In proof, let us cite a clear example to the point from either Testament. In Daniel 3 we find that the king of Babylon—the head of the "powers that be"—erected an image unto himself, and demanded that on a given signal, all must "fall down and worship" the same (verse 5). But the three Hebrew captives declared, "Be it known unto thee O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (verse 18); and the Lord vindicated their non-compliance. In Acts 4 we see Peter and John arrested by the Jewish "powers," who, "Commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (verse 18). Did the apostles submit to this ordinance? No, instead they said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (verse 19). As Romans 13:4 declares, the magistrate is "the minister of God to thee for good": should he require that which the Word condemns as evil, he is not to be obeyed.

And what was it that enabled the parents of Moses to act so boldly and set at naught the royal edict? Our text furnishes clear answer: it was "by faith" they acted. Had they been destitute of faith, most probably the "king's commandment" would have filled them with dismay, and in order that their own lives should be spared, would have promptly informed his officers of the birth of Moses.

But instead of so notifying the Egyptians, they concealed the fact, and though by preserving the child they followed a course which was highly hazardous to sense, yet under God it became the path of security. Thus, the particular aspect of our theme which here receives illustration is the courage and boldness of faith: faith overcoming the fear of man. That brings before us another characteristic of this heavenly grace, one which evidences its excellency, and one which should move us to pray daily for an increase of the same.

Faith is a spiritual grace which enables its possessor to look away from human terrors, and to confide in an unseen God. It declares, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1). True it is that this faith is not always in exercise, yea, more often is its bright shining overcast by the clouds of unbelief, and eclipsed by the murky dust which Satan raises in the soul. We say, "this faith," for there are thousands of professing Christians all around us who boast that their faith is constantly in exercise, and that they are rarely if ever tormented by doubts or filled with alarms. Ah, reader, the "faith" of such people is not "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1), entirely dependent upon the renewing power of the Holy Spirit; no, it is but a natural faith in the bare letter of Scripture, which by an act of their own will they can call into exercise whenever they please. But unto such the many "Fear nots" of God's Word have no application! But when the dew of Heaven falls upon the regenerated heart, its language is, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee" (Ps. 56:3).

Great indeed is the power of a God-given and God-sustained faith: not only to produce outward works, but to affect the workings of the soul within. This is something which is not sufficiently considered these days, when attention is confined almost exclusively to "visible results." Faith regulates the affections: it curbs impetuosity and works patience, it chases away gloom and brings peace and joy, it subdues carnal fears and produces courage. Moreover, faith not only sustains the hearts under severe trials, performs difficult duties, but (as the sequel here shows) obtains important benefits. How pertinent, then, was this particular case unto those to whom this Epistle was first sent! How well was it calculated to encourage the sorely-tried and wavering Hebrews to

remain faithful to Christ and to trust God with the issue and outcome!

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents." Probably two things are included in these words: first, that they concealed all tidings of his birth; second, that they hid him in some part of the house. No doubt their diligence was accomplished by fervent cries to God, and the putting forth of a daily trust in Him. The fact that it was "by faith" that they "hid" him, shows that real spiritual faith is cautious and wary, and not reckless and presumptuous. Though faith overcomes carnal fear, yet it does not disdain the use of lawful means for overcoming danger. It is fanaticism, and not faith, which tempts God. To needlessly expose ourselves unto danger is sinful. Faith is no enemy unto lawful means as Acts 27:31 plainly enough shows.

It is to be observed that the words of our text go beyond Exodus 2:2, where the preserving of Moses is attributed unto his mother. As both the parents were engaged in the hazard, both had a hand in the work; no doubt Amram took the lead in advice and contriving, and Jochebed in the actual execution. As the parents have a joint interest in their children, both should share in the care and training of them, each seeking to help the other. Where there is an agreement between husband and wife in faith and in the fear of God, it makes way for a blessed success in their duties. When difficult tasks confront husbands and wives, it is their wisdom to apply themselves unto that part and phase of it which each is best suited for. "It is a happy thing where yoke-fellows draw together in the yoke of faith, as the heirs of the grace of God; and where they do this in a religious concern for the good of their children, to preserve them not only from those who would destroy their lives, but corrupt their minds" (Matthew Henry).

The "three months" teaches us that the parents of Moses persevered in that which they began well. They were prudent from the hour of his birth, and they maintained their vigilance. It is no use to shut the stable-door when the horse is gone. Care in preventing danger is to be continued as long as the danger is threatened. Some, perhaps, may ask, Would it be right for the people of God today to give shelter to one of His saints or servants who was being unjustly hounded by "the power that be"? Surely; it is always the duty of love to shield others from harm. But suppose the hidden one is being

inquired-after by the authorities, may they still be concealed? Yes, if it is done without the impeachment of the truth, for it is never permissible to lie- to do so shows a distrust of the sufficiency of God. Should the officers ask whether you are sheltering one they seek, either remain silent, or so prudently word your answer as will neither betray the party nor be guilty of falsehood.

Others may ask, Since God purposed to make Moses the leader of His people and accomplish such a memorable work through him, why did He not by some wonderful and powerful miracle preserve him from the rage of Pharaoh? Answer: God was able to send a legion of angels for his protection, or to have visibly displayed His might by other means; but He did not. It is generally God's pleasure to show His power through weak and despised means. Thus it was during the infancy of His own incarnate Son: God warned Joseph by a dream, and he took the young child and His mother into Egypt, remaining there till Herod was dead. Frequently it pleases the Most High to magnify His providence by things which men despise, by feeble instruments, and this, that it may the more plainly appear the excellency of the power is of Him.

In the preservation of the infant Moses, we may see a blessed illustration of how God preserves His elect through infancy and childhood, and from all that threatens their existence prior to the time when He regenerates them. This is expressed in Jude 1: "Preserved in Jesus Christ and called." How blessed is it for the Christian to look back behind the time when God called him out of the darkness into His marvelous light, and discern His guarding hand upon him when he was dead in trespasses and sins. There are few if any of the Lord's people who cannot recall more than one incident in early life when there was "but a step" betwixt them and death; yet even then, as in the case of the infant Moses, a kind Providence was watching over them. Then let us return thanks for the same.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child: and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." It is really surprising how many of the commentators, led by sentiment, have quite missed the meaning of this verse. Exodus 2:2 states that his mother saw "that he was a goodly child": the Hebrew word ("tob") being the same term whereby God approved of His works of creation and declared them

perfect (Gen. 1), from which the conclusion has been drawn that, it was the exceeding fairness or beauty of the babe which so endeared him to his parents they were moved to disregard the king's edict, and take special pains to preserve him. But this is only carnalizing Scripture, in fact, contradicting what the Holy Spirit has here said.

Hebrews 11:23 distinctly affirms that it was "by faith" the parents of Moses acted, and this it is which explains their conduct. Now Romans 10:17 tells us, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God": thus Amram and Jochebed must have received a Divine revelation (not recorded in the O.T.), and this word from God formed the foundation of their confidence, and supplied the motive-power of what they did. It is true they knew from the prophecy given to Abram (Gen. 15) that the time for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was drawing near, as they also knew from the prediction of Joseph (Gen. 50:24) that God was going to undertake for His people. Yet we are persuaded that Hebrews 11:23 refers to something more definite and specific. Most probably the Lord made known to these parents that their child was to be the promised deliverer, and furnished them beforehand with a description of him.

This revelation which Amram and Jochebed "heard" from God they believed, and that, before Moses was born. When, in due time, he was given to them, they "saw he was a proper child"—it was the discernment of faith, and not the mere admiration of nature. As Acts 7:20 declares "in which time was born Moses, and was beautiful to God" (Bagster Inter.), which indicates an appearance of something Divine or supernatural. They recognized he was peculiarly grateful and acceptable to God: they perceived something remarkable in him, which was the Divine token to them that he would be the deliverer of Israel. "Probably there was some mark of future excellency impressed on the child, which gave promise of something extraordinary" (John Calvin). "The beauty of the Lord set upon him as a presage that he was born to great things, and that by conversing with God his face would shine (Ex. 34:29), and what bright and illustrious actions he should do for the deliverance of Israel, and how his name should shine in the sacred record" (Matthew Henry).

Resting with implicit confidence upon the revelation which they had received from Jehovah, their faith now confirmed by God's mark of identification upon the babe, the parents of Moses preferred

its safety before their own. It was not simply they trusted God for the outcome, but in their souls was that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1), and in consequence "they were not afraid of the king's commandments." Had it been only a natural or human admiration which they had for a signally beautiful child, then it had been "by affection" or "by infatuation" they hid the infant; and that would only have intensified their "fear," for the more they admired the infant, the more afraid would they have been of harm befalling it.

Mere beauty is by no means a sure sign of excellency, as 1 Samuel 16:7, 2 Samuel 14:25, Proverbs 31:30 plainly enough show. No, the infant Moses was "beautiful to God" (Acts 7:20), and perceiving this, Amram and Jochebed acted accordingly. First, they "hid" him for three months, "and when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bull-rushes" etc. (Ex. 2:3): it may be that the Egyptians searched the houses of the Hebrews every three months. No doubt it was under the Divine direction that the parents of Moses now acted, for surely the placing of this precious child by the brink of the fatal "river" (Ex. 1:22) was the last thing that carnal reason had suggested! We do not at all agree with those who think the faith of Moses' parents wavered when they placed him in the ark: when one lawful means of preservation from persecution will no longer secure, it is a duty to betake ourselves unto some other which is more likely to do so—Matthew 10:23.

In the kind providence of God, His interests and ours are often twined together, and then nature is allowed to work; though even then, grace must bear sway. So it was here: the parents of Moses had received a direct commandment from God how to act and what to do (as the "by faith" clearly denotes), and in their case, what He prescribed harmonized with their own feelings. But sometimes God's requirements and our natural affections clash, as was the case when He required Abraham to offer up Isaac, and then the claims of the lower must yield to the Higher. When the current of human affection clashes not with God's express precepts we may follow it, for He allows us to take in the help of nature: "a brother beloved . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord" (Philem. 16).

Hebrews 11:24-25

Chapter 71 - The Faith of Moses

"The apostle, as we showed before, takes his instances from the three states of the church under the O.T. The first was that which was constituted in the giving of the first promise, continuing to the call of Abraham. Herein his first instance is that of Abel, in whose sacrifice the faith of that state of the church was first publicly confessed, and by whose martyrdom it was confirmed. The next state had its beginning and confirmation in the call of Abraham, with the covenant made with him and the token thereof. He therefore is the second great instance on the roll of testimonies. The constitution and consecration of the third state of the church was in giving of the law; and herein an instance is given in the law-giver himself. All to manifest, that whatever outward variations the church was liable to, and pass under, yet faith and the promises were the same, of the same efficacy and power under them all" (John Owen).

In approaching the careful study of our present verses it is of great importance to observe that they begin a new section of Hebrews 11: if this be not seen, they cannot be interpreted aright. The opening verse of each section of this chapter takes us back to the beginning of the life of Faith, and each one presents a different aspect of the nature or character of saving faith. The first three verses of Hebrews 11 are introductory, the fourth beginning the first division. There, in the example of Abel, we see where the life of faith begins (at conversion), namely with the conscience being awakened to a consciousness of our lost condition, with the soul making a complete surrender to God, and with the heart resting upon the perfect satisfaction made by Christ our Surety. That which is chiefly emphasized there is faith in the blood. But placing his faith in the blood of Christ is not all that is done by a sinner when he passes from death unto life.

The second section of Hebrews 11 commences at verse 8 where we have set before us another aspect of conversion, or the starting-point of the Life of Faith. Conversion is the reflex action or

effect from a soul which has received an effectual call from God. This is illustrated by the case of Abraham, who was, originally, an idolater, as we all were in our unregenerate state. The Lord of glory appeared unto him, quickened him into newness of life, delivered him from his former manner of existence, and gave him the promise of a future inheritance. The response of Abraham was radical and revolutionary: he set aside his natural inclinations, crucified his fleshly affections, and entered upon an entirely new path. That which is central in his case was, implicit obedience, the setting aside of his own will, and the becoming completely subject to the will of God. But even that is not all that is done by the sinner when he passes from death unto life.

The case of Moses brings before us yet another side of conversion, or the beginning of the Life of Faith, a side which is sadly ignored in most of the "evangelism" of our day. It describes a leading characteristic of saving faith, which few professing Christians now hear (still less know) anything about. It shows us that saving faith does something more than "believe" or "accept Christ as a personal Savior." It exhibits faith as a definite decision of the mind, as an act of the will, as a personal and studied choice. It reveals the fundamental fact that saving faith includes, yea, begins with, a deliberate renunciation or turning away from all that is opposed to God, a determination to utterly deny self and an electing to submit unto whatever trials may be incident to a life of piety. It shows us that a saving faith causes its possessor to turn away from godless companions, and henceforth seek fellowship with the despised saints of God.

There is much more involved in the act of saving faith than is generally supposed. "We mistake it if we think it only to be a strong confidence. It is so indeed; but there are other things also. It is such an appreciative esteem of our Christ and His benefits, that all other things are lessened in our opinion, estimation, and affection. The nature of faith is set forth by the apostle when he saith, 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yet, 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; and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the

righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death' (Phil. 3:7-10). And therefore true faith makes us dead to the world, and all the interests and honors thereof: and is to be known not so much by our confidence, as by our mortification and weanedness; when we carry all our comforts in our hands, as ready to part with them, if the Lord called us to leave them" (Thomas Manton, 1660).

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (verses 24, 25). Here we see the nature and influence of a saving faith. Two things are to be particularly noted: in it there is an act of relinquishment, and an act of embracing. In conversion, there is a turning from, and also a turning unto. Hence, before the sinner is invited to "return unto the Lord," he is first bidden to "forsake his way," yes, his way—having "his own way." So too we are called on to "repent" first, and then "be converted," that our sins may be "blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself" (Matthew 16:24). What is meant by the denying of "self"? This, the abridging ourselves of those things which are pleasing to the flesh. There are three things which are chiefly prized by the natural man—life, wealth, and honor; and so in the verses which immediately follow, Christ propounded three maxims to counter them. First, he says, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" (verse 25): that is, he who thinks first and foremost of his own life, whose great aim is to minister unto "number one," shall perish.] Second, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (verse 26): showing us the comparative worthlessness of earthly riches. Third, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He reward every man according to his works" (verse 27): that is the honor we should seek.

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." Here was a notable case of self-denial: Moses deliberately renounced the privileges and pleasures of a royal palace. It was not that he was now disowned and cast out by the woman who had adopted him; but that he voluntarily

relinquished a position of affluence and ease, disdaining both its wealth and dignities. Nor was this the rash impulse of an inexperienced youth, but the studied decision of one who had now reached the age of forty (Acts 7:23). The disciples said, "We have forsaken all, and followed Thee" (Matthew 19:27): their "all" was a net and fishing-smack; but Moses abandoned a principality!

The denying of self is absolutely essential; and where it exists not, grace is absent. The first article in the covenant is, "thou shalt have no other gods before Me": He must have the pre-eminence in our hearts and lives. God has not the glory of God unless we honor Him thus. Now God does not have the uppermost place in our hearts until His favor be esteemed above all things, and until we dread above everything the offending of Him. As long as we can break with God in order to preserve any worldly interest of ours, we prefer that interest above God. If we are content to offend God rather than displease our friends or relatives, then we are greatly deceived if we regard ourselves as genuine Christians. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37).

"Faith is a grace that will teach a man to openly renounce all worldly honors, advantages, and preferments, with the advantage annexed thereto. When God calls us from them, we cannot enjoy them with a good conscience" (Thos. Manton). We are often put to the test of having to choose between God and things, duty and pleasure, heeding our conscience or gratifying the flesh. The presence and vigor of faith is to be proved by our self-denial! It is easy to speak contemptuously of the world and earthly things, but what is my first care? Is it to seek God or temporal prosperity? To please Him or self? If I am hankering after an increase in wages, or a better position, and am fretful because of disappointment, it is a sure proof that a worldly spirit governs me. What is my chief delight? earthly riches, honors, comforts, or communion with God? Can I truly say, "For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand" (Ps. 84:10)?

"All believers are not called to make the same sacrifices, or to endure the same trials for righteousness' sake, nor have all the same measure of faith; yet, without some experience and consciousness of this kind, we are not warranted to conclude that we

are of Moses' religion; for a common walking-stick more resembles Aaron's fruitful rod, than the faith of many modern professors of evangelical truth does the self-denying faith of Moses or Abraham" (Thomas Scott). The faith of God's elect is a faith which "overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4), and not one which suffers its possessor to be overcome! "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24); not ought to, but have done so—in some real measure at least!

The great refusal of Moses consisted in a firm resolution of mind not to remain in that state wherein he had been brought up. This was not attained, we may be sure, without a hard fight, without the exercise of faith in prayer and trust in God. He knew full well all that his decision involved, yet, by grate, made it unhesitatingly. His resolution was made known not by a formal avowal, but by deeds, for actions ever speak louder than words. There is no hint in the sacred record that Moses verbally acquainted his foster-mother with his decision, but his converse with his brethren (Ex. 2:11 etc.) revealed where his heart was, and identified him with their religion and covenant. Ah, dear reader, it is one thing to talk well about the things of God, but it is quite another to walk accordingly; as it is one thing to pen articles and deliver sermons, and quite another to practice what we preach!

Not only was Moses' renunciation of his favored position a grand triumph over the lusts of the flesh, but it was also a notable victory over carnal reason. First of all, his action would seem to indicate the height of ingratitude against his foster-mother. Pharaoh's daughter had spared his life as an infant, brought him into her own home, reared him as her son, and had him educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. For him to turn his back upon her now would appear as though he was devoid of appreciation—so little is the natural man able to understand the motives which regulate the workings of faith. The truth is that, the commandments of the second table are binding upon us no further than our compliance with them is agreeable to our obedience unto the commandments of the first table. The saint is neither to accept favors from the world, nor to express gratitude for the same, if such be contrary to the fear of God, and the maintenance of a good conscience.

We are never to be dutiful to man at the expense of being undutiful to God. All relations must give way before preserving a

clear conscience toward Him. His rights are paramount, and must be recognized and responded to, no matter how much the doing so may clash with our seeming obligations unto our fellows. A friend or kinsman may be entertaining me in his home, and show me much kindness through the week, but that will not justify or require me to join him on a picnic or frolic on the Sabbath day. "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). The language of the Christian ought ever to be, "wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

To enjoy worldly honors is not evil in itself, for good men have lived in bad courts. Daniel is a clear case in point: most of his life was spent in high civic office. When Divine providence has given worldly riches or worldly prestige to us, they are to be entertained and enjoyed, yet with a holy jealousy and prayerful watchfulness that we be not puffed up by them, remembering that, "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov. 16:19). But such things are to be renounced when they are sinful in themselves, or when they cannot be retained with a clear conscience. Against his conscience, Pilate preferred to condemn Christ than lose Caesar's friendship, and stands before us in Holy Writ as a lasting warning. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

Again; not only did Moses' great refusal seem like gross ingratitude unto her who had adopted him, but it also looked like flying in the face of Providence. It was God who had placed him where he was; why, then, should he forsake such an advantageous position? Had Moses leaned unto his own understanding and listened to the dictates of carnal reason, he had found many pretexts for remaining where he then was. Why not stay there and seek to reform Egypt? Why not use his great influence with the king on behalf of the oppressed Hebrews? Had he remained in the court of Pharaoh, he would escape much affliction; yes, and miss too the "recompense of the reward." Ah, my reader, unbelief is very fertile, argues very plausibly, and can suggest many logical reasons why we should not practice self-denial!

What was it, then, which prompted Moses to make this noble

sacrifice? A patriotic impulse? a fanatical love for his brethren? No, he was guided neither by reason nor sentiment: it was "by faith" that Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. It was the clinging of his heart to the Divine promise, the apprehension of things not seen by the outward eye, the confident expectation of future reward. Ah, it is faith which imparts to the heart a true estimate of things, which views objects in their real light, and which discerns the comparative worthlessness of what the poor worldling prizes so highly, and through his mad quest after which he loses his soul. Faith views the eternity to come, and when faith is in healthy exercise, its possessor finds it easy to relinquish the baubles of time and sense. Then it is the saint exclaims. "Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them" (Ps. 39:6).

What a truly remarkable thing that one in Egypt's court should have such a "faith"! Moses had been brought up in a heathen palace, where there was no knowledge of the true God; yea, nothing but idolatry, wantonness, and profanity. Yes, some of Christ's sheep are situated in queer and unexpected places, nevertheless the Shepherd seeks them out, and either delivers them from or sustains them in it: the wife of "Herod's steward" (Luke 8:3), the saints in Nero's "household" (Phil. 4:22) are notable examples. What illustrations are these of "The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies" (Ps. 110:2)! However His enemies may rage, seek to blot out His name and root out His kingdom, Christ shall preserve a remnant according to the election of grace "even where Satan's throne is" (Rev. 2:13).

Some one may object, "But Joseph had faith as well as Moses, yet he did not leave the court, but continued there till his death." Circumstances alter cases! Their occasions and conditions were not alike. "God raised up Joseph to feed His people in Egypt, therefore his abode in the court was necessary under kings that favored them; but Moses was called not to feed His people in Egypt, but to lead them out of Egypt; and the king of Egypt was now become their enemy, and kept them under bitter bondage. To remain in an idolatrous court of a pagan prince is one thing; but to remain in a persecuting court, where he must be accessory to their persecutions, is another thing" (T. Manton).

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God,

than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (verse 25). This gives us the positive side of Moses's glorious decision. There is both a negative and a positive side to faith. First, a refusing, and then a choosing, and that order is unchanging. There must be a "ceasing to do evil" before there can be a "learning to do well" (Isa. 1:16, 17); there must be a "hating the evil" before there is a "loving the good" (Amos 5:15); there must be a "confessing and forsaking" of sin, before there is "mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The prodigal must leave the far country, before he can go to the Father (Luke 15). The sinner must abandon his idols, before he can take up the Cross and follow Christ (Mark 10:21). There must be a turning to God, "from idols," before there can be a "serving the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). The heart must turn its back upon the world, before it can receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

"Moses gave up the world; and ambition had the prospect of honor and greatness; the culture of the most civilized state was fascinating to the mind; treasure and wealth held out potent allurements. And all this—and does it not comprise 'all that is in the world,' and in its most attractive and elevated manner?—Moses gave up. And, on the other side, what awaited him? To join a down-trodden nation of slaves, whose only riches was the promise of the invisible God" (Adolph Saphir). A man is known by his choice. Do you do evil for a little profit? Do you avoid duty because of some trifling inconvenience? Are you turned out of the way because of reproach?

Moses preferred to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a brief season. Do you? He judged it the greatest misery of all to live in sin. Do you? Here is an important test: which gives you greater grief, sin or bodily affliction? Which troubles you the more: suffering loss in the world, or displeasing God? There are thousands of professing Christians who complain of their physical aches and pains, but how rarely do we hear any groaning over the body of sin and death! When you are afflicted in the body, which is your dominant desire: to be freed from the suffering, or for God to sanctify the suffering unto the good of your soul? Ah, my reader, what real and supernatural difference is there between you and the moral worldling? Is it only in your creed, what you believe with the intellect? "The demons believe."

Yes, it is our refusal and our choice which identifies us,

which makes it manifest whether we are children of the devil or children of God. It is the property of a gracious heart to prefer the greatest suffering—physical, mental, or social—to the least sin: and when sin is committed, it is repudiated, sorrowed over, confessed, and forsaken. When "suffering" is inflicted upon saints by persecutors, the offense is done unto us; but "sin" is committed against God! "Sin" separates from God (Isa. 59:2), "suffering" drives the Christians nearer to God. "Affliction" only affects the body, "sin" injures the soul. "Affliction" is from God (Heb. 12:5-11), but "sin" is from the devil. But naught save a real, spiritual, supernatural faith will prefer suffering affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

"None of the exemplifications of the importance of believing, brought forth by the apostle, is better fitted to serve his purpose than that which we have been considering. The Hebrew Christians were called on to part with an honor which they were accustomed to value above all other dignities. They were excommunicated by their unbelieving brethren, and denied the name of true children of Abraham. Their unbelieving countrymen were enjoying wealth and honor. The little flock they were called on to join were suffering affliction and reproach. Now, how is this to be done? Look at Moses. Believe as Moses believed, and you will find it easy to judge, choose, and act as Moses did. If you believe what Christ has plainly revealed, that 'it is His Father's good pleasure to give' His little flock, after passing through much tribulation, 'the kingdom'; if you are persuaded that, according to His declaration, 'wrath is coming to the uttermost' on their oppressors, you will not hesitate to separate yourselves completely from your unbelieving country-men.

"The practical bearing of the passage is not confined to the Hebrew converts, or to the Christians of the primitive age. In every country, and in every age, Jesus proclaims 'If any man would be My disciple he must deny himself, he must take up the cross, and follow Me.' The power of the present world can only be put down by 'the power of the world to come'; and as it is through sense that the first power operates on our minds, it is through faith alone that the second power can operate on our minds. Some find it impossible to make the sacrifices Christianity requires, because they have no faith. They must be made; otherwise our Christianity is but a name, our

faith is but a pretense, and our hope a delusion" (John Brown).

Hebrews 11:25-26

Chapter 72 - The Faith of Moses

"The person here instanced as one that lived by faith, is Moses. And an eminent instance it is to his purpose, especially in his dealings with the Hebrews, and that on sundry accounts. 1. Of his person. None was ever in the old world more signalized by Providence in his birth, education, and actions, than he was. Hence his renown was both then, and in all ages after, very great in the world. The report and estimation of his acts and wisdom, were famous among all the nations of the earth. Yet this person lived and acted, and did all his works by faith. 2. Of his great work, which was the typical redemption of the church. A work it was great in itself; so God expresseth it to be, and such as was never wrought in the earth before (Deut. 4:32-34). Yet greater in the typical respect which it had to His eternal redemption of the Church by Jesus Christ. 3. On the account of his office. He was the lawgiver, whence it is manifest, that the law is not opposite to faith, seeing the lawgiver himself lived thereby" (John Owen).

Each example of faith supplied by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 11 presents a distinctive feature or fruit of that spiritual grace. The faith which is here described is saving faith, without which no man is accepted by God (see verse 6). It is true that all Christians are not given the same measure of faith, nor do all of them manifest it in the same manner. All flowers are not of the same hue, nor are they equally fragrant; yet every variety differs radically from weeds! Not every saint is called upon to build an ark, offer up his son in sacrifice, or forsake a palace; nevertheless, there is that in the heart and life of every regenerate soul which plainly distinguishes him from those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and which clearly bears the mark of the supernatural--there is that in him which mere nature does not and cannot bring forth.

While it be true that very few Christians are called upon to leave a palace, yet every one who would become a Christian is required to forsake the world: not physically, but morally. God does

not bid us become hermits, or enter a convent or monastery—that is only the Devil's perversion of the truth of separation; but He does insist that the sinner must cast away the idols of the world, turn from its vain pleasures, cease walking in its evil ways, and set his affections upon things above. Scripture is unmistakably plain upon this point, declaring, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). That which was adumbrated by Moses in our present passage was, the heart's renunciation of a vain and perishing world, and giving God His true place in the affections.

In our last article we saw how Moses voluntarily relinquished his position of a nobleman in Pharaoh's court, and preferred to have fellowship with the despised and suffering people of God. In this he was a blessed type of Him who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, who descended from the glory of Heaven, and was born in a manger; who laid aside His robes of majesty, and took upon Him the form of a servant. And my reader, His people are predestinated "to be conformed to" His image (Rom. 8:29). He has left them an example, and there is no other route to Heaven, but by "following His steps": see John 10:4! There is a real and practical oneness between the Head and the members of His mystical body, and that practical oneness consists in self-sacrifice. Unless the spirit of self-sacrifice rules my heart, I am no Christian!

The way to Heaven is a "narrow" one and the entrance to it is "strait," and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13, 14). Because that way is "narrow," opposed to all the inclinations of flesh and blood, Christ bids us to "sit down and count the cost" (Luke 14:31) before we start out. The "cost" is far too high for all who have never had a miracle of grace wrought within them, for it includes the cutting off of a right hand and the plucking out of a right eye (Matthew 5:29, 30)—that is why 1 Peter 4:18 asks, "If the righteous scarcely be saved (or "with difficulty be saved") where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear"! Few indeed are, like Moses, willing to pay the "cost." Alas, the vast majority, even in Christendom, are like Esau (Heb. 12:16) or the Gadarenes (Mark 5:14, 15) —they prefer to indulge the flesh rather than deny it.

The difficulty of salvation, or the "straitness" of the gate and the "narrowness" of the way which leadeth into Life, was strikingly

prefigured by the alluring temptations and carnal obstacles which had to be overcome by Moses. As we pointed out in our last article, his noble decision not only involved the leaving of Pharaoh's palace, the apparent ingratitude toward his foster-mother, the ignoring of the precedent set up by Joseph; but, it also meant the throwing in his lot with a despised people, enduring all the discomforts and hardships of their wilderness wanderings, and the bringing down upon his head not only the contempt of his former associates, but having to endure the murmurings and criticisms of the Hebrews themselves. Ah, my reader, such a choice as Moses made was altogether contrary to flesh and blood, and can be accounted for only on the ground that a miracle of Divine grace had been wrought within him. As our Lord declared, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

From what has been said above, is it not unmistakably evident that as great a distance as that which separates heaven from earth divides Scriptural "Conversion" from that which goes under the name of "conversion" in the vast majority of the so-called "churches" today! A genuine and saving Conversion is a radical and revolutionary experience. It is vastly more than the taking up of a sound creed, believing what the Bible says about Christ, or joining some religious assembly. It is something which strikes down to the very roots of a man's being, causing him to make an unreserved surrender of himself to the claims of God, henceforth seeking to please and glorify Him. This issues, necessarily, in a complete break from the world, and the former manner of life; in other words, "if any man be in Christ, he is new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (verse 24). It is the first two words of this verse which supply an adequate explanation of the noble conduct of Moses here. A God-given faith is occupied with something better than the things of sight and sense, and therefore does it discern clearly the utter vanity of worldly greatness and honor. Faith has to do with God, and when the mind be truly stayed upon Him, neither the riches nor the pleasures of earth can attract, still less enthrall. Faith relies upon and is obedient unto a personal revelation from on High, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Moses had "heard," Moses

"believed," Moses acted on what he had heard from God.

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (verse 25). Yes, each of us has to choose between life and death (Deut. 30:15), between sin and holiness, between the world and Christ, between fellowship with the children of God and friendship with the children of the Devil. When Moses took the part of an Israelite against an Egyptian (Ex. 2), he declared plainly that he preferred the former to the latter, that the promises of God meant far more to him than the fame or luxury of an earthly court. Yet at that time the seed of Abraham were in an exceedingly low state, nevertheless Moses knew that the promises which God had made unto the patriarchs could not fail.

That was faith indeed: to willingly forego the attractive prospects which lay before him in the land of the Nile, and deliberately prefer a path of hardship. What he had "heard" from God was to him so grand, so great, so glorious, that, after thoughtfully balancing the one over against the other, Moses rejected material aggrandisement for spiritual riches: he considered it to be a far higher honor to be a child of Abraham than to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He might have reasoned that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and have "made the most of his (present) opportunity," rather than have set his heart on an unseen future; but the spirit triumphed over the flesh. O how we need to pray for grace to enable us to "approve things that are excellent," that we may be "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10).

It is to be duly noted that Moses elected to suffer affliction with the Hebrews not because they were his people, but because they were God's people. "The object of his choice was God; the One who chose his fathers, who revealed to them His truth and grace, and commanded them to walk before Him without fear; the God who was not ashamed to be called their God, and to whom he had been dedicated in his infancy" (Adolph Saphir). Observe that fellowship with "the people of God" necessarily involves, in some form or other, "affliction." Yes, God has ordained that "we must through much tribulation enter into His kingdom" (Acts 14:22), and declares, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). But why should this be so? Why has not God appointed a smoother path and a pleasanter lot for His high

favorites while they pass through this world? We subjoin one or two of the many answers which may be returned to this question.

God has decreed that the general state of His people on earth shall be one of hardship, opposition, persecution. First, to arouse them to spiritual diligence. He has told them in His Word "This is not your rest" (Mic. 2:10), nevertheless there is a tendency in us to settle down here. Again and again God bids us to watch and pray, to be sober and vigilant, alert and active; but only too often His exhortations fall on deaf ears. The "wise virgins" slumbered and slept as well as the "foolish" ones, and need awakening; because they will not heed such calls as are found in Romans 13:11, Ephesians 5:14 etc. He uses the Enemy to arouse us. Second, to wean us from the world: because there is that in us which still loves the world, God, in His mercy, often stirs them up to hate us. Third, to conform us more fully unto the image of Christ: the Head endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and His body is called to have "fellowship in His sufferings."

The "pleasures of sin" in verse 25 has immediate reference to the riches and dignities of Pharaoh's court, which Moses could no longer enjoy without being unfaithful to God and His people. To have gone on living in the palace, would be despising Jehovah and His covenant with Abraham's seed. It would have been preferring his own advancement and ease rather than the deliverance of his people; he would have been conducting himself as a worldling, rather than as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene; and worse, he would have been conniving at Pharaoh's cruel treatment of the Hebrews. Moreover, to have resisted the impulse of the Spirit on his heart would have been sin. This shows us that things which are not sinful in themselves, become so when used or enjoyed at the wrong time. Every thing is beautiful in its season: "There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

The principle we have just enunciated above is of great practical importance. Material things become snares if employed intemperately. God has granted us permission to "use" the things of this world, but has forbidden the "abuse" of them (1 Cor. 7:31). Temporal blessings become a curse if they are allowed to hinder us from the discharge of duty. All associations must be severed which deter us from having fellowship with the saints. Personal ease and comfort is to be set aside when our brethren are "suffering

afflictions" and need a helping hand. Alas, only God knows how many professing Christians have continued to enjoy the luxuries of life, while thousands were without some of the bare necessities of life.

Everything which is severed from true Godliness is included in this expression "the pleasures of sin." Temporal mercies are to be enjoyed with thankfulness to God, but only so far and so long as they help to promise a true following of the example which Christ has left us. Alas, how many are seeking their happiness in the things of the flesh, rather than in the things of the Spirit. Scripture says, "Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Prov. 15:16)—but how few believe it! Mark it well, dear reader, the "pleasures of sin" are only for "a season," and a solemnly brief season at that: they must end either in speedy repentance or speedy ruin. How blessed is the contrast presented in Psalm 16:11, "At Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"! Is my heart set upon them? If so, I am making it my chief concern, every day, to walk along the only path which leads to them.

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (verse 26). Here the Holy Spirit mentions a third instance of Moses' contempt of the world: first, of its honors (verse 24), then of its pleasures (verse 25), now, of its wealth. Note the emphatic graduation in the decision of Moses as intimated in the three verbs: first, he "refused" to be any longer acknowledged as the adopted son of Egypt's princess. Second, he "chose" or deliberately elected to become identified with and throw in his lot among the despised and suffering people of God. Third, he "esteemed" the reproach this involved, as high above that which he relinquished and renounced. The same Greek word is rendered "judged" in verse 11, showing that it was no rash conclusion which he jumped to hastily, but that it was the mature consideration of his mind and heart. Another has compared the three verbs here with Mark 4:28: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

This 26th verse is an amplification of what is found in the 24th and 25th, and announces both the intelligence of Moses' choice and the fervor of spiritual affection which prompted it. The decision that he made was not a reluctant and forced one, but ready and joyous. It was not merely he perceived that identifying himself with the Hebrews was a bounden duty, and therefore he must "make the

best of a bad job" and put up with the hardships such a course entailed, but that he gladly preferred the same—Christ meaning infinitely more to him than everything which was to be found in Egypt. Reader, is the denying of self and taking up of the cross something which you grudgingly perform, or does the "love of Christ constrain" (2 Cor. 5:14) you thereto? Can you, in your measure, say with the apostle, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake"

(2 Cor. 12:10)?

What is meant here by "the reproach of Christ"? The Savior was not born till many centuries later; true, but those whom the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world, were, from Abel onwards, well acquainted with Him: see John 8:56. Christ had a being before He was born of the virgin: we read of Israel "tempting Christ" in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:9). From the beginning, Christ was Head of the Church, and in His own person led His own people, and was present in their midst, under the name of "the Angel of the Covenant." Let the interested reader carefully ponder the terms of Exodus 23:20-22, and it should be plain that no created "angel" is there in view. Thus, whatever that people suffered, it was the reproach "of Christ," who had taken them under His protection. There was a communion between Christ and His people, as real and as intimate as that union and communion which exists between Him and His people now: weigh well Isaiah 63:9, Zechariah 2:8, and compare with Acts 9:4, Matthew 25:34 and clear proof of this will be obtained.

The "reproach of Christ," then, signifies first, Christ personally as identified with His people. Second, it has reference to Christ mystically, His redeemed as one with Him in humiliation and persecution. "Christ and the church were considered from the beginning, as one mystical body; so as that what the one underwent, the other is esteemed to undergo the same" (John Owen). In marriage the wife takes the name and status of her husband, because they have become "one flesh": in like manner, the Church is called "Christ" in 1 Corinthians 12:12, Galatians 3:16 because of its union and communion with Him, because of the likeness and sympathy between them. Nor was this blessed mystery kept concealed—as modern "dispensationalists" wrongly declare—from the O.T. saints,

as a careful comparison of Jeremiah 23:6 with Jeremiah 33:16 makes very evident. Moses had "heard" from God that the Hebrews were His people, and the remnant among them "according to the election of grace" were ordained to be "joint heirs with Christ," and believing what he heard, he voluntarily and gladly decided to throw in his lot with them.

That the mystical body of Christ, the Church, is in view here in Hebrews 11:26—for the Head and His members can never be separated, though they may be viewed distinctly—is abundantly clear by a careful comparison of the preceding clauses. Verses 25 and 26 are obviously parallel, and explain one another. In the former we are told that, Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Thus, there is a threefold parallelism: the "reproach of verse 26 agrees with and is interpreted by the "suffering affliction" of verse 25, "the Christ" of verse 26 corresponds with and is defined by "the people of God" in verse 25; and the "treasures of Egypt" balances with and explains the "pleasures of sin for a season."

"For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." This was what strengthened and supported the faith of Moses. He had never forsaken the honors and comforts of the palace unless his heart had been fixed upon the eternal recompense. Faith realizes that peace of conscience is better than a big bank-balance, that communion with God is infinitely to be preferred above the favors of an earthly court. Moses knew that he would be no loser by such a choice: faith sees that nothing is lost which is quitted for Christ's sake—though the name of Moses was removed from Egypt's records, it has been accorded a prominent place upon the imperishable pages of Holy Writ. See here the vast difference between worldlings and saints; the former estimate things by sight, the latter by faith; the former through the colored glass of corrupt reason and carnal sense, the latter by the light of God's Word. Thus they wonder at each other: the worldling thinks the real Christian is crazy, the Christian knows the poor worldling is spiritually insane.

The heart of Moses was set upon something more blessed than the perishing things he was relinquishing. The "he had respect" is a compound in the Greek, and properly signifies to look from one thing to another: he looked from the things of time to those of eternity, for "faith is the substance of those things hoped for, the

evidence of things not seen": cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17. This is one of the great properties of faith: to frequently and trustfully ponder the promise of Eternal Life, which we are to dwell in forever after this scene of sin is left behind. Faith perceives that the way to "save" is to "lose" (Matthew 16:25), that present self-denial will yet be honored by enrichment, knowing that if now we suffer with Christ we shall be "also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17). How this condemns the practice of many who spend their lives in the greedy pursuit of the world, with no regard to God or their eternal interests, but think that if they call on Him for mercy with their last gasp, all will be well. Such people terribly deceive themselves by failing to see that Eternal Life is a "reward"—see Luke 1:74, 75: we must labor in the works of godliness in this life.

That which Moses had "respect unto" is here called "the recompense of the reward." This is the all-sufficient presence of God with His people now (Gen. 15:1), and the great and final reward of Eternal Glory which is given by God, and received by His people as a compensation for all their sufferings. This is one of the N.T. passages which proves the O.T. saints had a much clearer understanding of the future state of the redeemed than is now commonly supposed. For the reward of good works, see Hebrews 6:9, of patience, Hebrews 6:12, of suffering, Hebrews 10:34. The calling of Heaven a "reward" in nowise imports any desert on man's part, but abundant kindness in God, who will not suffer anything to be done or endured for Christ's sake without recompense. It is called a "reward" to encourage obedience (Ps. 19:11) and allure our hearts (Matthew 5:12). That a gift may be a "reward" is clear from Colossians 3:24. It is also called a "reward" because it is God's owning of the Spirit's work in and through His people. Since eternal glory is a "reward" let us be patient under present suffering: Romans 8:18. It is legitimate to view the reward of Heaven while serving here—not that this is to be the chief or only motive (for that would be a religion of selfishness), but as faith's anticipation: cf. Philippians 3:8-14. The reward is "gratuitous that God hath annexed to faith and obedience, not merited or deserved by them, but infallibly annexed unto them in a way of sovereign bounty" (John Owen).

Hebrews 11:26-27

Chapter 73 - The Faith of Moses

In our last two articles (upon 11:24-26) we had before us the striking example of the power of faith to rise above the honors, riches, and pleasures of the world; now we are to behold it triumphing over its terrors. Faith not only elevates the heart above the delights of sense, but it also delivers it from the fear of man. Faith and fear are opposites, and yet, strange to say, they are often found dwelling within the same breast; but where one is dominant the other is dormant. The constant attitude of the Christian should be, "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid" (Isa. 12:2). But alas, what ought to be, and what is, are two vastly different things. Nevertheless, when the grace of faith is in exercise, its language is, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee" (Ps. 56:3). So it was with Moses: he is here commended for his courage.

The leading feature of that particular working of Moses' faith which we are now to consider was its durability. That which engaged our attention on the last two occasions occurred when our hero had "come to years." Forty years had elapsed since then, during which he passed through varied experiences and sore trials. But now that he is eighty years of age, faith is still active within him. That spiritual grace moved him to withstand the attractions of Egypt's court, had led him to relinquish a position of high honor and wealth, had caused him to throw in his lot with the despised people of God; and now we behold faith enabling him to endure the wrath of the King. A God-given faith not only resists temptations, but it also endures trials, and refuses to be daunted by the gravest dangers. Faith not only flourishes under the dews of the Spirit, but it survives the fires of Satanic assault.

True faith neither courts the smiles of men nor shuns their frowns. Herein it differs radically from that natural faith, which is all that is possessed by thousands who think they are children of God. Only yesterday we received a letter in which a friend wrote, "I know some professing Christians who boasted that the prospect of being

out of work did not trouble them at all: for they knew every need would be supplied. Now that they have no work, they are not nearly so confident, but are wondering how in the world they are going to get along." So too we read of the stony ground hearer, "The same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended" (Matthew 13:20, 21). Far otherwise was it with Moses.

"By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." Moses left Egypt on two different occasions, and there is some diversity of opinion among the commentators as to which of them is here in view. Personally, we think there is little or no room for doubt that the Holy Spirit did not have reference unto the first, for we are told, "And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian" (Ex. 2:14, 15). There he fled as the criminal, here he went forth as the commander of God's people! then he left Egypt in terror, but now "by faith."

There are some, however, who find difficulty in the fact that Moses' leaving of Egypt is here mentioned before his keeping of the passover and sprinkling of the blood in 5:28. But this difficulty is self-created, by confining our present text unto a single event, instead of understanding it to refer unto the whole conduct of Moses: his forsaking of Egypt is a general expression, which includes all his renouncing a continuance therein and his steady determination to depart therefrom. So too his "not fearing the wrath of the king" must not be restricted unto the state of his heart immediately following the Exodus, but also takes in his resolution and courage during the whole of his dealings with Pharaoh. And herein we may perceive again the stability of his faith, which withstood the most fiery ordeals, and which remained steadfast to the end. Thus did he supply a blessed illustration of "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5).

The experiences through which Moses passed and the testings to which his faith was subjected, were no ordinary ones. First, he was bidden to enter the presence of Pharaoh and say, "Thus

saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness" (Ex. 5:1). Let it be duly considered that for forty years Moses had lived the life of a shepherd in Midian, and now, with no army behind him, with none in Egypt's court ready to second his request, he has to make this demand of the haughty monarch who reigned over the greatest empire then on earth. Such a task called for no ordinary faith. Nor did he meet with a favorable reception; instead, we are told "And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2).

Not only did the idolatrous king refuse point-blank to grant Moses' request, but he said, "Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, hinder the people from their work? get you unto your burdens... Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves" (Ex. 5:4, 7). Well might the heart of the stoutest quake under such circumstances as these. To add to his troubles the heads of the Israelites came unto Moses and said, "The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savor to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Ex. 5:21). Ah, faith must be tested; nor must it expect to receive any encouragement or assistance from men, no, not even from our own brethren—it must stand alone in the power of God.

Later, Moses was required to interview Pharaoh again, after Jehovah had informed him He had "hardened" his heart, and say, "The Lord God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness: and, behold, hitherto thou wouldest not hear. Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that is in the river shall die, and the river shall stink; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink of the water of the river" (Ex. 7:16-18). It is easy for us now, knowing all about the happy sequel, to entirely under-estimate the severity of this trial. Seek to visualize the whole scene. Here was an insignificant Hebrew, belonging to a company of slaves, with no powerful "union" to press their claims. There was the powerful monarch of Egypt, who, humanly speaking had only to give the word to his officers, and Moses had been seized, beaten, tortured,

murdered. Yet, notwithstanding, he "feared not the wrath of the king."

We cannot now follow Moses through all the stages of his great contest with Pharaoh, but would pass on to the closing scene. After the tenth plague, Pharaoh called for Moses and proposed a compromise, which, upon Moses refusing, he said, "Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die" (10:28). But Moses "feared not the wrath of the king," and boldly announced the final plague. Not only so, he declared that his servants should yet pay him homage (Ex. 11:4-8). "He had before him a bloody tyrant, armed with all the power of Egypt, threatening him with present death if he persisted in the work and duty which God had committed to him; but he was so far from being terrified, or declining his duty in the least, that he professeth his resolution to proceed, and denounceth destruction to the tyrant himself" (John Owen).

After the tenth plague had been executed, Moses led the children of Israel out of the land in which they had long groaned in bondage. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king." Even now he was not terrified by thoughts of what the enraged monarch might do, nor at the powerful forces which he most probably would send in pursuit; but staying his mind upon God, he was assured of the Divine protection. He allowed not gloomy forebodings to discourage him. Yet once more we would say, it is easy for us (in the light of our knowledge of the sequel) to under-estimate this marvel. Visualize the scene again. On the one hand was a powerful nation, who had long held the Hebrews in serfdom, and would therefore be extremely loath to let them altogether escape; on the other hand, here was a vast concourse of people, including many thousands of women and children, unorganized, unarmed, unaccustomed to travel, with a howling wilderness before them.

Ah, my reader, does not such a situation as we have hastily sketched above, seem utterly hopeless? There did not seem one chance in a thousand of succeeding. Yet the spirit of Moses was undaunted, and he is here commended to us for his courage and resolution. But more; Pharaoh, accompanied by six hundred chariots and a great armed force, pursued them, and "when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the

Egyptians marched after them: and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us to carry us forth out of Egypt?" (Ex. 14:10, 11). Here was the crucial moment, the supreme test. Did Moses' heart fail him, was he now terrified by "the wrath of the king"? No indeed; so far from it, he calmly and confidently said unto the people, "Fear ye not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Ex. 14:13, 14).

O how the undaunted courage of Moses shames our petty fears! What cause have we to blush, and hang our heads in shame. Many are there who fear very much less than the wrath of a "king": such things as darkness and solitude, or even the rustling of a leaf, will frighten them. No doubt such fear is constitutional with some, but with the great majority it is a guilty conscience which makes them alarmed at a shadow. The best way for weak ones to overcome their timidity is to cultivate the sense of God's presence; and for the guilty, to confess and forsake their sins. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). Fear is the result of distrust, of taking the eye off God, of being unduly occupied with difficulties and troubles.

And what was it that enabled Moses to conduct himself with such firmness and boldness? What was it that delivered his heart from fearing the wrath of the king? FAITH, a spiritual, supernatural, God-given, God-energized faith. Reader, do you know anything, experimentally, of such a faith? Again we would be reminded that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Moses had heard, he had heard something from God, and his faith laid hold of and rested upon the same. What was it that he had heard? This, "Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent you: when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain"

(Ex. 3:12). So, too, if we are Christians, God has said to us, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Therefore "we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5, 6).

Perhaps some one may ask, But was there no wavering in Moses' faith? Yes, dear reader, for he was a man of like passions with us. They who have a faith which never varies, which remains the same whether it be cloudy and stormy, or fair and sun-shiny, have nothing but a natural and letter faith. A spiritual and supernatural faith is one which we did not originate and is one which we cannot call into exercise whenever we please: God imparted it, and He alone can renew and call it into action. When the leaders of Israel murmured against Moses, and charged him with endangering their lives (Ex. 5:21), we are told that, Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all" (Ex. 5:22, 25). Blessed is it to behold the patience of God with His failing servant, and to see how He comforted and strengthened him: Exodus 6:1-8.

"By faith he forsook Egypt." Faith assures the heart of a better portion in return for any thing God calls us to relinquish. No matter how attractive to the senses, no matter how popular with our fellows, no matter how necessary it may seem for the interests of our family, faith is convinced that God will not suffer us to be the losers: 1 Samuel 2:30. So Abraham left Chaldea, so Ruth forsook Moab (Heb. 1:16). Here is one way in which a true faith may be discerned and known: if we were born and brought up in an idolatrous place, where honors, pleasures and treasures might be enjoyed, and we, for conscience sake, have forsaken that place, then surely we have a spiritual faith. Few are now required to do as Abraham did, but all are commanded to obey 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17.

Ah, there are many who forsake Egypt's (the world's) vices and pleasures, who do not separate from its religion, and that was the central thing in the final test which Moses' faith had to overcome. Again and again Pharaoh sought a compromise, but with inflexible firmness Moses stood his ground. The demand of God was, "Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness" (Ex. 5:1): there must be a complete separation from the religion of the world. But that is something which the world cannot brook, for the withdrawal of God's people condemns them; hence we find Pharaoh saying, "Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Ex. 8:25). But Moses was not to be moved, "We will go three days'

journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He shall command us" (Heb. 8:27).

Next we are told Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness, only ye shall not go very far away" (Heb. 8:28): this was tantamount to saying, "If you are determined to adopt this holier than thou attitude, there is no reason why there should be a complete break between us." After the Lord had further plagued Egypt, the king again sent for Moses and Aaron and asked, "Who are they that shall go?" Moses answered, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons, and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds" (Heb. 10:9). But that was too much for Pharaoh, who replied, "Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord" (Heb. 10:11). See here in Pharaoh, my reader, our great Adversary, striving to get us to temporize: "If you are determined to forsake the church, at least leave your children in the Sunday School !" How subtle the Devil is! What a living book is the Word! How thoroughly suited to our present lot and needs!

One more effort was made by Pharaoh to induce Moses to render only a partial obedience unto God's demands: "Go ye, serve the Lord, only let your flocks and your herds be stayed" (Heb. 10:24)—if you must be so unsociable, if you will be so mulish and not allow your children to remain in Sunday School, at least retain your membership with us and pay into the "church-treasury" as hitherto! Ah, had Moses feared the wrath of the king, he had yielded this point. Instead, he remained firm, and said, "Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind: for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God" (10:25, 26). Well might the apostle write, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11)—no, for they have been fully exposed to us in Holy writ.

All of what has been before us above is included in these words "By faith he forsook Egypt," and all of it is "written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4). The offers made by Pharaoh to Moses to prevent Israel from completely forsaking Egypt in their worship of the Lord, are, in essence, the very temptations which His people now have to overcome, if they are to fully heed and obey 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with

unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." O my Christian reader, seek grace to obtain the uncompromising spirit of Moses. When urged to worship God in "Egypt" (i. e. the white-washed "churches" of the world), say it is impossible, for "what communion hath light with darkness!" when pressed to leave your children in a worldly Sunday School, to be instructed by those who have not the fear of God upon them, refuse, when invited to at least retain your membership in the Holy Spirit-deserted "churches" and contribute of your means to their upkeep, decline to do so.

"Not fearing the wrath of the king." The courage of Moses is here set forth in three degrees: he feared not man; he feared not the greatest of men, a king; he feared not that which most affrights people, the wrath of a king—"The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion" (Prov. 19:12). It was his faith in God which expelled this fear. When faith is exercised the greatest terrors cannot alarm saints. And, my reader, those who "forsake Egypt," especially religions of Egypt, must expect to encounter the "wrath" of man: none hates so bitterly, none acts so cruelly, none comes out more in his true colors, than the worldly religionist when the veneer of hypocritical piety has been seen through by a child of God. Yet his "wrath" is less to be feared than was Pharaoh's: "If God be for us, who can be against us!"

"For he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." Ah, here is the key to all that has been before us, Moses "endured," which tells us of the state of his heart. He "endured" the attractive honors and alluring pleasures of Egypt's court; he "endured" the repeated compromises of Pharaoh; he "endured" the terrors which his conduct might inspire. His courage was no mere flash in the pan, or momentary bravado; but was steady and real. O how little of this faith and its blessed fruit of holy boldness, is now to be seen in poor, degenerate Christendom. Yet how could it be otherwise, when worldliness has "quenched" the Spirit on every hand? May we who have, by sovereign grace, been drawn to Christ outside the camp, be very jealous and watchful against grieving the Spirit.

The precise word which is here rendered "endured" is not employed elsewhere in the N.T. Scholars tell us that it is derived from a root meaning strength or fortitude, to bear evils, undergo dangers with resolution and courage, so as not to faint beneath them,

but hold on our way to the end. It was a word most appropriate to express the firmness of Moses' mind in this work of faith in "forsaking Egypt." He met with a long course of difficulties, and was repeatedly threatened by the king; and, in addition, he had to endure a great conflict with his own unbelieving brethren. But he strengthened himself with spiritual courage and resolution to abide in his duty to the finish. How? Whereby was his strength renewed?

"For he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." Ah, it was no mulish stupidity nor obstinate imprudence that wrought such a resolution in Moses, but the constant occupation of his heart with the Divine perfections. We say "the constant occupation," for note carefully our text does not say "he endured because he saw Him who is invisible," but "as seeing Him who is invisible"—it was a continuous act! O to be able to say in our measure, "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps. 16:8). This is absolutely essential if faith and courage are to be kept healthy. Nothing else will enable us to "endure" the frictions and trials of life, the attractions and distractions of the world, the assaults of Satan.

"He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." "God is said to be invisible (as He is absolutely) in respect of His essence, and is often so called in the Scripture: Romans 1:20, Colossians 1:15, 1 Timothy 1:17. But there is a peculiar reason for this description of Him here. Moses was in that state and condition, and had those things to do, wherein he stood in need continually of Divine power and assistance. Whence this should proceed, he could not discern by his senses, his bodily eyes could behold no present assistant, for God is 'invisible'. And it requires an especial act of the mind in expecting help from Him who cannot be seen. Wherefore this is here ascribed to him. He saw Him who was in Himself invisible; that is, he saw by faith, whom he could not see with his eyes" (John Owen). This word "invisible" shows the uselessness (as well as sin) of making images to represent God, and warns against our forming any apprehensions in our mind patterned after the likeness of any visible object. Though God be invisible, yet He sees us!

"He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." "A double act of the faith of Moses is intended herein. 1. A clear, distinct view and apprehension of God in His omnipresence, power and faithfulness. 2. A fixed trust in Him on their account, at all times and on all occasions. This he rested on, this he trusted to, that God was

everywhere present with him, able to protect him, and faithful in the discharge of His promise" (John Owen). God is the proper object of faith: on which it rests, from which it expects every good and to which it returns the glory for all.

O the surpassing excellency of faith. It takes in eternal, invisible, infinite objects. By His providences God often appears to be against His people, but faith knows He is for them. In this world we are subject to many trials and miseries, but faith knows that "all things work together for good to them that love God." The bodies of God's children die, are buried, and return to dust; but faith beholds a glorious resurrection for them. O the wondrous power of faith to rise above the things of sight and sense. It is true that neither the impartation of faith, nor its growth and exercise, lie within our power; nevertheless, we are responsible to avoid those things which becloud and weaken faith, and we are responsible to nourish faith. How very few make serious efforts to see "Him who is invisible!"

Hebrews 11:28

Chapter 74-The Faith of Moses

There is more about Moses than any other individual in this 11th chapter of Hebrews. No less than five definite actings of his faith are there recorded. The reason for this is not far to seek. He was the law-giver, and the boast of the Jews of Christ's day was, "We are Moses' disciples" (John 9:28). They were seeking acceptance with God on the ground of their own doings. They supposed that their outward conformity to the ordinances of Moses would secure the approbation of Heaven, and therefore, "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). It was under this influence that these converted Hebrews had been brought up, and therefore did the Holy Spirit press upon them the fact that it was by faith, and not by a legal spirit, their renowned ancestor had lived and acted.

The particular acting of Moses' faith which we are now to consider was one which would be singularly pertinent to the Spirit's design here: it manifested his trust in the Lamb and testified to the value which he placed upon the sprinkled blood. Instituting and observing the feast of the passover, the leader of the Israelites set an example that could not be ignored without fatal consequences. It completely repudiated the awful error of thinking to escape from the wrath of God in consequence of any performances on the part of the creature. It effectively shuts up the sinner to Christ as his only hope. Let it be duly considered that the "passover" was the first ordinance given to Israel.

How striking it is to see the law-giver himself preaching, by those actings of his recorded in our text, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). How great is the ignorance, then, which supposes that salvation by grace is peculiar to this Christian dispensation—as though God has several ways of redeeming sinners. No, my reader, from the beginning to the end of

human history every fallen descendant of Adam which enters Heaven will owe it to sovereign grace, flowing to him through the appointed channel of faith, entirely irrespective of all his works, religious or irreligious, before he first trusts in Christ. Abel was saved thus: Hebrews 11:4. Noah "found grace in the eyes of the Lord: Genesis 6:8. Abraham "believed God, and it was counted unto him for ("unto") righteousness": Romans 4:3. And the children of Israel were delivered from the Angel of Death because they were sheltered beneath the blood of the lamb.

That which is now before our consideration formed an appropriate and blessed climax to the actings of Moses' faith recorded here in Hebrews 11: all the others led up to one. His refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, his choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, his esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and his forsaking of Egypt would all have been in vain spiritually, that is, so far as his salvation was concerned, unless those had been followed by faith in the lamb and the efficacy of its blood. Turning away from the world is not sufficient: there must also be a turning unto God. The forsaking of sin is not enough: there must also be the laying hold of Christ. This is what is typically in view in our present text.

It is highly important that the closest attention be paid to the order of truth set forth in Hebrews 11:24-28. If this be done, the defectiveness of much modern "evangelism" will at once be apparent. The keeping of the passover and the sprinkling of the blood is not the first thing recorded of Moses! No man can rightly value the blood of Christ while his heart is still wrapped up in the world, and to invite and exhort him to put his trust in the same, is being guilty of casting pearls before swine. No man can savingly believe in Christ while he is determined to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Repentance precedes faith (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21): and repentance is a sorrowing over sin, a hatred of sin, and a turning from sin; and where there is no genuine repentance, there can be no "remission of sins": Mark 1:4. Let every preacher who reads this article carefully weigh all that is here recorded of Moses, and faithfully instruct his congregation that the different exercises of heart recorded in Hebrews 11:24-27 must precede that which is stated in verse 28.

It is really deplorable that such elementary aspects of Truth as we have just pointed out above need to be stressed at this late date. Yet such is the tragic case. Laodicean Christendom is boasting of its riches, and knows not that it is poor and wretched and naked. Part of those "riches" which she boasts so loudly of today, is the "great increase of light" which it is supposed that the study of prophetic" and "dispensational" truth has brought to us. Yet not only is that a subtle device of Satan's coming as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), to darken men's understandings, and make them believe that his lies are "wonderful discoveries" and openings up of the Scriptures, but the present generation has far less real Light than Christendom enjoyed a century ago. By which we mean, there is far less faithful and fearless preaching of those things which make for practical godliness and holy living. But that is not the worst: Scriptural evangelism has well-nigh disappeared from the earth.

The "Gospel" which is being preached today is only calculated to deceive souls and bolster them up in a false hope. To make men believe that God loves them, while they are under His wrath (see John 3:36), is worse than a physician telling a diabetic subject that he may safely eat all he wishes. To withhold the preaching of the Law—its Divine authority, its inexorable demands, its spirituality (in requiring inward conformity to it: Matthew 5:22, 28), its awful curse—is to omit that which alone conveys a true knowledge of sin: see Romans 3:20, 7:7. To cry "Believe, believe," and say nothing about repentance, is to falsify the terms of salvation: Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30. To invite sinners to receive Christ as their "Savior" before they surrender to Him as their Lord, is to present a false "way of salvation." To bid the lost "come to Christ" without telling them they must first "forsake the world," is to fill the "churches" with unconverted souls. To tell sinners they may find rest unto their souls without taking Christ's YOKE upon them, is to give the lie unto the Master's own teaching: Matthew 11:29.

We offer no apology for this seeming digression from our present subject. Once again we would point out that it is our earnest desire in this series of articles to write something more than a "commentary" on Hebrews, or give a bare "exposition" of its text: rather do we seek (as the Holy Spirit is pleased to enable) to address ourselves directly to the hearts of our readers, and press upon them the personal and present application of each verse to their own souls.

In all probability a large proportion of the readers of this magazine are deceived souls, and we do not want to have to answer for their blood in the Day to come. Many of them have been lulled to sleep by the chloroforming "evangelism" of the day. Therefore we earnestly beg each one who scans these paragraphs to seriously and solemnly ask, Is there anything in my own heart's history which answers to that which is said of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-27? If there is not, if you are not "crucified to the world" (Gal. 6:14), then Satan is fatally deluding you if you imagine that you are under the blood of Christ.

Suffer us then, dear reader, to continue addressing you directly, for a moment longer. We do not ask, first, Are you "resting on the finished work of Christ?" There are thousands who imagine they are so doing, who have never been converted. No, rather would we inquire, Have you made your peace with God? We are well aware that expression is ridiculed and denounced by a certain class who pose as being ultra-spiritual and exceptionally well-taught in the Scriptures, but they only betray their ignorance of the Word: see Isaiah 27:5, Luke 14:32. By asking whether you have "made your peace with God," we mean, Have you ceased fighting against Him, and have you yielded to His demands? Have you thrown down the weapons of your rebellion, and expressed an honest desire and determination to be in subjection to Him? Have you realized that living to please yourself and have your own way, is a species of defiance, and have you truly surrendered yourself unto His claims?

"Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the firstborn, should touch them" (verse 28). Let it be pointed out again that this was the point unto which all the previous actings of Moses' faith led. While it is true that no sinner can "keep the Passover" or find protection under "the sprinkling of blood," while his heart still loves the world, and is filled with its idols, nevertheless, his separation from and relinquishing of all which is opposed to God, obtains not salvation for him. The blotting out of sins does not become ours until the atonement of Christ is received into our hearts by faith. Thus, by taking Hebrews 11:24-28 as a whole, we see how both the righteousness and the grace of God were honored and magnified.

Our present verse looks back to and gives an abridgement of that which is recorded in Exodus 12. It tells us of a further fruit of a

supernatural faith. At first sight it may appear unto many that this particular work of faith is far less remarkable than some of those which have engaged our attention in previous articles. Yet when it be duly considered, when all the attendant circumstances are properly weighed, it will be seen that the conduct of Moses on this occasion was as much opposed to human reason and carnal wisdom, and issued from a Divine work of grace in his heart, as did Abraham's leaving of Chaldea for an unknown country, his offering up of Isaac, or Joseph's "making mention of the departing of the children of Israel." We quote now from another who has brought out this point most forcibly and helpfully.

"The institution of the Passover was an act of faith, similar to that of Noah's preparation of the ark (verse 7). To realize what this faith must have been, we have to go back to 'that night,' and note the special circumstances, which can alone explain the meaning of the words 'by faith.' God's judgments had been poured out on Egypt and its king, and its people. A crisis had arrived, for, after nine plagues had been sent, Pharaoh and the Egyptians still remained obdurate. Indeed, Moses had been threatened with death if he ever came into Pharaoh's presence again (Ex. 10:28, 29). On the other hand, the Hebrews were in more evil case than ever; and Moses, who was to have delivered them, had not made good his promises.

"It was at such a moment that Moses heard from God what he was to do. To sight and to sense it must have seemed most inadequate, and quite unlikely to accomplish the desired result. Why should this last plague be expected to accomplish what the nine had failed to do, with all their cumulative terrors? Why should the mere sprinkling of the blood have such a remarkable effect? And if they were indeed to leave Egypt 'that same night' why should the people be burdened with all those minute ceremonial observances at the very moment when they ought to be making preparation for their departure!

"Nothing but faith could be of any avail here. Everything was opposed to human understanding, and human reasoning. With all the consciousness of ill-success upon him, nothing but unfeigned faith in the living God, and what he had heard from Him, could have enabled Moses to go to the people and rehearse all the intricacies of the Paschal observances, and tell them to exercise the greatest care in the selection of a lamb on the tenth day of the month, to be slain

on the fourteenth day, and eaten with (to them) an unmeaning ceremonial.

"It called for no ordinary confidence in what Moses had heard from God to enable him to go to his brethren who, in their deep distress, must have been ill-disposed to listen; for, hitherto, his efforts had only increased the hatred of their oppressors and their own miseries as bondmen. It would, to human sight, be a difficult if not impossible task to persuade the people, and convince them of the absolute necessity of complying with all the minute details of the observance of the Paschal ordinance. But this is just where faith came in. This was just the field on which it could obtain its greatest victory. Hence we read that 'by faith' every difficulty was overcome; the Feast was observed, and the Exodus accomplished. All was based on 'the hearing of faith.' The words of Jehovah produced the faith, and were at once the cause and effect of all the blessings" (E.W.B.).

It should be evident, then, from what has been pointed out above that the actions of Moses recorded in Exodus 11 and 12 proceeded from no mere natural faith, but were the supernatural fruit issuing from a supernatural root. His conduct must have exposed him unto the ridicule of the Egyptians, but with implicit confidence in the wisdom, distinguishing mercy, and faithfulness of Jehovah, he acted. See here, again, how inseparable are faith and obedience: the very "faith" of Moses which is mentioned in our present text, consisted in an implicit compliance with all the regulations specified by the Lord. He observed the passover in his own person, and he ordered the people to do likewise, though it involved their procuring many thousands of lambs. He observed the passover in fullest assurance that thereby all the firstborn of the Hebrews would be delivered. Though all Israel kept the passover, it was by Moses that God delivered the institution of it.

The passover was one of the most solemn institutions of the O.T., and one of the most eminent types of Christ. "1. It was a lamb that was the matter of his ordinance (Ex. 12:3). And in allusion hereunto, as also to other sacrifices that were instituted afterwards, Christ is called 'The Lamb of God' (John 1:29). 2. This lamb was to be taken out from the flock of the sheep (verse 5). So was the Lord Christ to be taken out of the flock of the church of mankind, in His participation of our nature, that He might be a meet sacrifice for us

(Heb. 2:14-17). 3. This lamb being taken from the flock was to be shut up separate from it (Ex. 12:6). So although the Lord Christ was taken from amongst men, yet He was separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26), that is, absolutely free from all that contagion of sin which others are infected withal. 4. This lamb was to be without blemish (Ex. 12:5), which is applied unto the Lord Christ: 'a Lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet. 1:19). 5. This lamb was to be slain, and was slain accordingly (verse 6). So was Christ slain for us; a Lamb, in the efficacy of His death, slain, from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). 6. This lamb was so slain, as that it was a sacrifice (verse 27); it was the sacrifice of the Lord's passover. And Christ our passover was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). 7. The lamb being slain, was to be roasted (verses 8, 9), which signified the fiery wrath that Christ was to undergo for our deliverance. 8. That 'not a bone of him shall be broken' (verse 46), was expressly to declare the manner of the death of Christ (John 19:33-36). 9. The eating of him, which was also enjoined, and that wholly and entirely (verses 8, 9), was to instruct the church in the spiritual food of the flesh and blood of Christ, in the communication of the fruits of His mediation unto us by faith" (John Owen).

By faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them." Two things are here noted separately, the lamb and its blood. In type they spoke, distinctively, of the person and work of Christ, for it was the person of Christ which gave value to His work—His Divine person being the "altar" which "sanctified" the offering of His humanity (Matthew 23:19). This is ever the order of Scripture: "Behold (1) the Lamb of God, which (2) taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); "I determined not to know anything among you save (1) Jesus Christ and (2) Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2); "in the midst of the elders stood (1) a Lamb (2) as it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). Here is the Analogy of Faith for the preacher to follow today: It is not the blood which is first to be proclaimed to the sinner, but the wondrous and glorious God-man Mediator who shed His blood for His people.

The Hebrews, equally with the Egyptians, were exposed unto the Divine vengeance, when the Angel of Death went forth on his dread work that memorable night, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." And naught but their placing the substitutionary death of an innocent victim between their guilty

selves and an holy God, could protect from the judgment announced against them. Trusting in their descent from Abraham would avail them not. Appeal to their good works and religious performances would have sufficed not. They might have spent the entire night in fasting and prayer, in penitently confessing their sins and crying unto God for mercy, but none of those exercises would have stood them in any good stead. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Ex. 12:13) made known the all-essential requirement. So it is now; nothing but the blood of Christ can cleanse from sin and deliver from the death-penalty of God's broken law.

"Through faith" or better "By faith," for the Greek here is the same as in the previous verse. "He kept the passover," that is, both instituted and observed it, as the Redeemer did His own "supper." "And the sprinkling of blood": this emphasizes an important-distinction. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22), and without sprinkling of blood (cf. 1 Peter 1:2) the virtues of Christ's atonement are not brought unto the soul. The "sprinkling" of the blood has reference to the application to one's own self. The shedding of Christ's blood is the ground on which atonement was made for the sins of His people; the sprinkling of it is the means of reaping benefit thereby. The sprinkling of the blood on the door of the house in Exodus 12:13 was both a sign to the Destroyer that He should not enter, and an assurance to the household that they were safe.

It is by a spiritual "sprinkling" or applying of Christ's blood that all the benefit thereof redounds to us. It corresponds to the laying of a plaster on a sore, to the drinking of a wholesome potion, to the eating of food, to the putting on of a garment: the benefit of all these ariseth from a fit application of them. The blood of Christ is "sprinkled" on the soul in two ways. First, by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:11), who inwardly persuades the soul of a right that it hath to Christ and to all that He did and suffered for our redemption. Second, by faith (Acts 15:9), for faith is the hand of the soul which receives all spiritual benefits. Faith moves the regenerated soul to rest upon Christ for a personal benefit of His obedience unto death. On this ground the apostle exhorts, "Let us draw near with a true heart in a full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil (guilty) conscience" (Heb. 10:22).

"Lest He that destroyed the firstborn should touch them."

Primarily, the Destroyer was the Lord Himself (Ex. 12:12, 23); secondarily, and instrumentally, the reference is to an angel: compare 2 Samuel 24:16, 2 Kings 19:35. Whoever is not "sprinkled" with the blood of Christ is exposed to the anger of God. But so secure are those who are under the same, that the Destroyer shall not so much as "touch" them—He shall do them no harm: cf. 1 John 5:18. God proportioned His judgment upon Egypt according to their sin: Pharaoh had ordered his people to cast every son born unto the Hebrews into the river (Ex. 1:22), and now their firstborn were to be slain. Thus God manifested the equity of His proceedings against them. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Our verse as a whole teaches Christians that there must be the exercise of faith in order to a right use of the means and institutions which God has appointed: whether in reading the Word, in prayer, in baptism, or the Lord's supper: "without faith it is impossible to please Him." It also shows us that real faith will not use that for which it has no Divine warrant. An active obedience unto the authority of Christ in His commands is exactly required in all that we do in Divine worship. Well suited to the case of the Hebrews was the example of Moses: to exercise faith in the Lamb and persevere in the duties which God has appointed. No matter how unreasonable it might seem to carnal wisdom, no matter what inconvenience and persecution it might entail, trust in and obedience to the Lord was their duty and blessedness.

Hebrews 11:29

Chapter 75 - The Faith of Israel

The apostle's object in this 11th chapter of Hebrews is to show the power of real faith in God to produce supernatural acts, to overcome difficulties which are insuperable to mere nature, and to endure trials which are too much for flesh blood to bear up under. Various examples have been adduced in illustration. A further notable one is now before us. In it we see how faith enabled Israel to fearlessly venture themselves to enter a strangely formed valley between two mountainous ridges of water, and to reach in safety the opposite shore. In like manner, a real faith in God will enable the Christian to pass through trials and troubles which destroy multitudes of his fellow-creatures, and which will in due time conduct him unto the enjoyment of perfect bliss.

The force of the above example is greatly heightened by a striking and most solemn contrast. The power of faith in enabling Israel to safely cross the Red Sea is demonstrated by the helpless and hopeless destruction of the Egyptians, who sought to follow them. "The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen" (Ex. 14:23). But they had no faith. They were moved by passion, by hatred of the Hebrews. It was night when the army of God undertook their strange journey, yet though dark, the hosts of Pharaoh presumptuously and blindly followed. But now had arrived the hour when the long-insulted Divine forbearance was to be avenged.

"And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the hosts of the Egyptians; and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily; so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians" (Ex. 14:24, 25). But it was too late. The haughty monarch of Egypt and his powerful retinue now discovered how vain it was to fling themselves against the

bosses of Jehovah's buckler: that which had been a channel of deliverance to the believing Israelites, became the grave of their enemies. Thereby are we shown that all attempts of unbelievers to obtain what faith secures is utterly futile, and doomed to certain disappointment.

But here a difficulty presents itself, and a formidable one it has proved unto most of those who sought to grapple with it. In our text we are told that, "By faith they passed through the Red Sea," whereas in Hebrews 3:18, 19 it is said, "To whom sware He that they should not enter into His rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Was, then, their faith only a temporary one, like that of the stony-ground hearers? No, for the "faith" mentioned in every other verse in Hebrews 11 was a saving one, and we dare not arbitrarily assume this in 5:29 was an altogether different one.

The solution of our present difficulty lies in attentively noting the pronoun which the Holy Spirit has here employed: "By faith they passed through the Red Sea." It is not there said "By faith the children of Israel" did so, for it is very evident from their later history that the vast majority of them were "a very froward generation, children in whom was no faith" (Deut. 32:20). The reference, then, in our text is unto Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, and the believing remnant among the Hebrews. But, it may be asked, Did not the unbelieving portion of the Nation also pass safely through the Red Sea? Truly, and herein we have illustration of the fact that unbelievers are frequently made partakers of temporal blessings as the result of their association with people of God. Another example of this same principle is found in Acts 27:24 where we see that an entire ship's company were spared for Paul's sake.

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea, as by dry land; which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned" (Heb. 11:29). In seeking to expound this verse we cannot do better than adopt the division of the Puritan Manton thereon, considering it three ways: historically, sacramentally, and applicatively. First, then, historically.

Our text takes us back to what is recorded in Exodus 14. There we learn that when at last Pharaoh consented to let the Hebrews go, he soon repented of his grant, and being informed by his spies that the Israelites were entangled in the straits of Pihahiroth, he determined to pursue, and either recover or destroy

them. At the head of a great military force he swiftly went after them. The consequence was that "When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold the Egyptians marched after them: and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:10-12).

A truly desperate situation now faced Moses and the company he was leading. "Shut in between the great fortress 'Migdol,' which was on the 'Shur' or wall (built to protect Egypt from Asia), and the sea, with Pharaoh's host behind, and shut in on the other side by the wilderness: Exodus 14:2, 3. It was indeed a crisis" (E.W.B.). What could the poor Israelites do? Fight they dare not, being a multitude of undisciplined people, of all sexes and ages, and pursued by a regular and powerful army of enemies. Fly they could not, for they were completely hemmed in on every side. To all outward appearance their case seemed hopeless; and to human reason, nothing but sore destruction might be expected.

The situation which confronted Israel was a hopeless one so far as they were concerned, and had not the Lord shown Himself strong on their behalf, they had undoubtedly perished. But, "if God be for us, who can be against us"? Ah, my reader, that is the great thing for each of us to make sure of, and when we have done so, to seek grace to rest with unshaken confidence upon it. Has not God promised, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overthrow thee" (Isa. 43:2)! What better assurance than that can the believing heart ask for? No matter how deep and wide stretching, no matter how dark and foreboding the "waters" of adverse circumstances may be unto sight and sense, has not He who cannot lie declared, "They shall not overflow thee"!

"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever" (Ex. 14:13). Undeterred by the chiding of the people,

and wisely making no reply thereto, Moses turned their minds away from the outward danger and directed their thoughts unto Jehovah. They had "lifted up their eyes and beheld the Egyptians" (verse 10), and in consequence they were sore afraid; but there was something else for faith to "see," namely, "the salvation (or deliverance) of Jehovah," which was not yet visible to natural sight. If they were steadfastly occupied with that their trembling hearts would be stilled.

Admire, dear reader, the confident assurance which Divine grace wrought in the heart of Moses, for by nature he was a frail man of like passions and infirmities as us. But there was no wavering or doubting on his part: "see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show you today": that was the language of faith—of a supernatural, God-given faith. Moses was not engaged with the difficulties and dangers of the trying situation which confronted them; instead, he was occupied with One before whom all difficulties disappear like mists before the rising sun. "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (verse 14). Once the soul is able to rest on that fact, doubtings end and alarms are silenced.

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Faith must have a foundation to stand upon, and the only firm and sure one is the promise of the living God. "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show you today... The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" afforded the necessary ground for the faith of each believing Hebrew to rest upon. The eye of faith must see that Divine "salvation" or deliverance, before the eye of sense beheld it: only the sure word of God could give strength to their hearts to advance into the ocean before them. When the promise had been "heard," and not before, then came the order "Go forward."

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:15, 16). Thus we learn that the heart of Moses was engaged in silent supplication at this time. The Lord's statement here is not to be understood as a rebuke. No, Moses was waiting the word of command, and until it was given, he stayed

himself upon the Lord. "And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (verse 22).

"When Moses gave the signal by his rod, the sea miraculously retreated, standing up like heaps of congealed ice on either side while they passed through. This is done, and they go on safely; the sea flanked them on both sides; the rear was secured by the cloudy and fiery pillar interposing between them and Pharaoh's army, till such a time as all were out of danger, and safely arrived at the further shore; and so neither man nor child was hurt. The Egyptians followed the chase, as malice is perverse and blind, and those whom God designeth to destruction take the ready course to bring it upon their own heads; for at the signal again of Moses stretching forth his rod, the returning waters swallowed them all up in a moment" (T. Manton).

"A greater instance, with respect unto the work of Divine providence, of the power of faith on the one hand, and of unbelief with obdurate presumption on the other, there is not on record in the whole book of God. Here we have the end and issue of the long controversy that was between these two people, the Egyptians and the Israelites; a certain type and evidence of what will be the last end of the contest between the world and the church. Their long conflict shall end in the complete salvation of the one, and the utter destruction of the other" (John Owen).

Though it was night, the Divine pillar of cloud "gave light" unto Israel (Ex. 14:19). Dreadful indeed must have appeared those walls of water, for the sea would be raised unto a very great height on either side of them. It called for no ordinary faith to put themselves between such walls, as were ready in their own nature to fall on them unto their destruction any moment, abiding upright only under an invisible restraint. But they had the command of God for their warrant and the promise of God for their security, and these, when laid hold of, are sufficient to overcome all fears and dangers. That Moses himself, to guide and encourage them (and as the type of Christ) took the lead, is clear from Isaiah 63:11-13, "God led them through the sea by the right hand of Moses."

Let us now briefly consider the remarkable incident related in our text from a sacramental viewpoint. In 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2 we are told, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be

ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." From this scripture we learn that Israel's passage through the Red Sea had the same signification that Christian baptism now hath. The points of resemblance are many, and were developed at length by Manton, and more so by Gouge, from whom we here give a digest.

1. The ministry of Moses was confirmed by this miracle, so that the Israelites were obliged to take him for their leader and lawgiver: so the miracles wrought by Christ assure us that He was sent by God as our lawgiver, which we must hear and obey. 2. Israel's experience is (figuratively) denominated a "baptism" because it signified the difference which God puts between His people and His enemies: the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians was sealed by their passage through the Sea. Similarly baptism is said to be an answering figure to the ark of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20, 21): as those on the ark were exempted from the deluge, so those in Christ are exempted from the deluge of wrath which will yet overwhelm the world.

3. They were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea," because by submitting to God's command they gave up themselves to His direction: so in baptism we dedicate ourselves unto Christ, avowing Him to be our Lord and Master. 4. The passing through the Red Sea and baptism had both the same outward sign, which is water (Matthew 3:6). 5. They had like rites, which were entering into the water and coming out of it (Acts 8:38, 39). 6. They had both the same ground, which was God's command and promise (Ex. 14:13, 16 and Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16). 7. They were both for the same people, namely, the children of God (Matthew 28:19). 8. They were but once administered (Eph. 4:5).

Let us now consider some of the practical lessons which this marvelous incident is designed to teach us. 1. The children of God are sometimes called on to face great trials: a Red Sea of difficulty and trouble confronts them. Let it be duly observed that it was not an enemy who put the sea there, but God Himself! This tells us that the Red Sea represents some great and trying providence which the Lord places in the path of each newborn Christian: it is in order to try his faith and test the sincerity of his trust in God. Often this trial is encountered soon after conversion. Sometimes it arises from

opposition of ungodly members of our own family. Or, you are engaged in some business—perhaps requiring you to work on the Sabbath day—in which you cannot now conscientiously continue. It means renouncing your means of livelihood, and you cannot see how it can be done and provide things honest in the sight of all men. As you emerged from the bondage of Egypt you thought it would be easy to surrender everything to God, but now a Red Sea of testing is before you, and it appears unfordable.

2. The children of God are sometimes terrified by powerful enemies. The Egyptian who pursued Israel up to the Red Sea may be spiritualized to represent those sins of the Christians from which he expected to be completely delivered. For a little while after conversion sin does not much trouble the newly-regenerated saint: he is filled with joy and praise at the great things which the Lord has done for him. But it is not long before he discovers with the apostle "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). Satan now pursues the young saint, and often it seems as though all the powers of hell were let loose against him. At such a time our sins appear more formidable to us than before they were forgiven: in Egypt our taskmasters only appeared with their whips, but now they are mounted and in chariots! Ah, after conversion sin looks far more frightful to the saint than ever it did before, and we feel the plague of our heart much more acutely.

3. The people of God are often troubled with faint hearts. When the children of Israel saw the Egyptians they were sore afraid, and when they beheld the Red Sea they murmured against their deliverer. A faint heart is the worst foe a Christian has here: when the anchor of faith is fixed deep in the Rock, he need never fear the storm; but when the hand of faith be palsied, or the eye of faith be dim, it will go hard with us. When faith is dormant the most insignificant stream will make us quiver and cry: I shall be drowned in the flood; but when faith is dominant it fears not an ocean of difficulty or danger. The babe in Christ has but little faith, for he has but little experience: he has not yet proved God's promises and knows not His faithfulness. But as he grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, and becomes established in the faith, he will not despair before Red Seas and Egyptians; but meanwhile, he often trembles and asks, "How shall I ever find deliverance?"

4. The people of God are here instructed how to act under great trials. The first word the Israelites received in the hour of their great emergency was, "Fear ye not, stand still"; the second was "And see the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord, which He will show you today"; the third was, "Go forward" (Ex. 14:13, 15). It is of first importance that we should diligently attend to the Divine order of those three things: we are not equipped and ready to "Go forward" until we have "seen" (by faith) the "salvation of the Lord," and that cannot be properly seen until our fears are calmed and we stand still; or, in other words, till we turn from all self-help and cease from all the feverish activities of the flesh.

The continuous call of God to the Christian is "Go forward": persevering steadfastly along the path of duty, walking in that narrow way which the Divine commands and precepts have laid down for us. No matter what obstacles may confront you, no matter what your circumstances may be, no matter what Red Sea of difficulty or danger be before you, "Go forward" is God's authoritative word to you. "Ah, but often that is far from being an easy thing to do!" Quite true, dear friend; yea, we will state it still more strongly: it is often impossible to mere nature. What, then, is to be done when the heart faints, when the soul is well-nigh overwhelmed by the greatness of the difficulty or danger, standing right in your path? Two things; first "Stand still." Your own efforts to better matters have brought no relief, your own wisdom can devise no solution; very well, then "stand still": cease from all attempts at self-help.

"But," you answer, "I have my responsibilities to discharge, my duties to perform." Quite true: but admittedly you have now reached the place where a Red Sea is before you; you are dismayed and know not which way to turn. Here, then, is God's word to you in this dire emergency: "Stand still." This means, Get down on your knees, and cry unto the Lord: tell Him all about your trouble, unburden yourself freely and fully unto Him; spread your urgent need before Him. Probably, you answer, "I have done so, and thus far no way through my Red Sea has appeared before me." Then, you are now ready for His next word.

"And see the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord, which He will show you." And what does that mean? This, the exercise of faith in the living God, the trusting in Him to undertake for you, the

confident expectation He will do so. Cry unto the Holy Spirit to work this faith in you: remain on your knees until He has given you real assurance that your Father will show Himself strong on your behalf; wait before Him till one of His promises is applied to your heart in power. Then, you are ready to "Go forward," to resume your duties and discharge your responsibilities: to look for work, to go on with renewed strength. The Christian is only ready to "Go forward" when faith has seen that which is invisible to sight and sense, namely, the "salvation (deliverance) of the Lord" before it is actually wrought for us!

The way in which the Christian is required to walk as he journeys through this world on his way to Heaven is the path of obedience to God's commands. Naught but a spiritual faith inclines the heart to comply with God's demands, and upon compliance to expect the mercy promised: "Lord, I have hoped for Thy salvation, and done Thy commandments" (Ps. 9:166). This is the great business of faith: as the Israelites were to obey God, and to wait for His deliverance out of their imminent danger. Naught but a God-given faith imparts courage to obey God in the most difficult crisis. If we be bidden to go into the Red Sea we must not forbear, for none of God's commands are to be disputed, however contrary they be to flesh and blood. Faith teaches us to depend upon God in greatest extremities. Faith receives the promise of God upon the conditions or terms which He has specified. If Israel were to receive the "salvation" of the Lord," they must do what He bade. Faith and obedience can no more be separated than can light and heat in the sun.

As Abraham, at the call of God, went out of Chaldea, "not knowing whither he went," so Israel were required to "Go forward" though the Sea stretched before them. Probably it was not until their feet touched the brink that the waters divided. Nature might have gone over it, but faith passed safely "through" it! They feared they would be destroyed by Pharaoh's hosts. The very last thing that they would have looked to as a means of escape would be the Sea! Yet, in obedience to the Divine command, "The children of Israel went into the midst of the Sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (Ex. 14:22). Learn, then, dear reader, we never lose by obeying God.

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea." True faith lifts a

man above himself, puts into him a spirit which is more than human, and enables him to rise above the obstacles of reason and sense. Faith emboldened the hitherto trembling Israelites to venture through that strange chasm between the watery walls. "As by dry land" is added to magnify the Divine providence in making a path in the ocean's bottom fit for women and children to tread upon—like a plain and beaten highway. By faith they "passed through": they took not only a few steps, but continued to perseveringly march mile after mile and hour after hour. Hesitate not, my brother, to venture upon anything which God calleth you unto; be assured that He will safely carry you through all difficulties and dangers. "Which the Egyptians assaying to do, were drowned": the very means of Israel's deliverance was their destruction: see 2 Corinthians 2:16! It was a just retribution for the slaying of the male Hebrew children in the waters (Ex. 1).

5. The people of God may be assured of the Divine providence. When Israel "by faith," obeyed the Divine command to "Go forward," God wrought a miracle and delivered them from their dire situation. This is recorded for the encouragement of our hearts. It was God who had placed the Red Sea where it was, and it was God who opened the way for Israel through it. So, Christian reader, it is God (and not the Devil) who has brought about the problem, the emergency, the danger which now confronts you; for "of Him . . . are all things" (Rom. 11:36). As He has made thy Red Sea, only He can cleave a way through it for you. Trust, then, in His unerring wisdom. Count upon His mighty power working on your behalf. "Stand still" and rest yourself upon God. View "by faith" anticipatively, expectantly, His "salvation" or deliverance. "Go forward" in obedience to His commands, and He will show Himself strong on thy behalf. He never fails those who fully trust and unreservedly obey Him.

Hebrews 11:30

Chapter 76 - The Faith of Israel

In the preceding verse we had the faith of the believing remnant of Israel under the command and example of Moses, in our present text we have an exhibition and triumph of their faith under the leadership of Joshua. There we beheld what faith accomplished under their exodus from Egypt, here we see what it achieved upon their entering the promised land. As the yoke of bondage was by faith broken asunder, so by the same faith the people of God were to obtain possession of Canaan. Thereby we are taught that the true life of the saint is, from beginning to end, one of faith. Without faith no progress can be made, no victories be obtained, no fruit be brought forth unto God's glory. It is solemn to note that an interval of forty years' duration comes in between Hebrews 11:29 and 30. Those years were occupied in the wilderness. They were a judgment from God because of unbelief (Heb. 3). Reader, how many years of your life record no actings of faith to the praise of Divine grace?

The remarkable incident referred to in our text is related at length in the 6th chapter of Joshua, which opens by telling us, "Now Jericho was straitly shut up, because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in." Israel had reached the borders of Canaan. They had safely crossed the Jordan, but could not enter the land because of Jericho, which was a powerful fortress barring their ingress. This was one of the cities which had affrighted the spies, causing them to say, "The people is greater and taller than we: the cities are great and walled up to heaven" (Deut. 1:28): to their eyes the cities appeared impregnable, and far too secure for them to take.

Jericho was a frontier town. It was the key-city at the entrance to Canaan. Its capture was absolutely necessary before any progress could be made by Israel in their conquering and occupying of their promised inheritance. Failure to capture it would not only discourage the children of Israel, but would greatly strengthen the morale of the Canaanites. It was the enemy's leading stronghold, which doubtless, they considered to be quite invulnerable. Yet it fell

to a people who possessed no artillery, and without them fighting any battle. All they did, in response to Jehovah's order, was to march by faith around the city once each day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day, when they gave a great shout, and the walls fell down flat before them. Many important lessons are taught us therein, a few of which we will briefly mention, before dwelling at greater length upon the outstanding one.

First, God's ways are often entirely different from ours. Who ever heard of a powerful fortress being completely demolished in response to a company of people walking around it? Ah, God delights in staining the pride of man. The leader and lawgiver of Israel was preserved in an ark of bulrushes. The mighty giant of the Philistines was overcome by a sling and a stone. The prophet Elijah was sustained by a widow's handful of meal. The forerunner of Christ dwelt in a wilderness and fed upon locusts and wild honey. The Savior Himself was born in a stable and laid in a manger. His selected ambassadors were, for the most part, unlettered fishermen. Striking illustrations are these of the sentence beginning this paragraph. The things which are highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God. It is well for us to remember this.

Second, God is independent of all natural means and superior to all the "laws of nature." It is true that, as a general rule, God is pleased to bless the use of natural means, and that He frequently accomplishes His ends by the operations of those laws of nature which He has set in motion; but it is a great mistake to imagine that He is tied down either by the one or the other. What natural "means" were employed in Israel's crossing of the Jordan or their capturing of Jericho? What natural "means" were used in the preserving of Daniel in the lion's den or Jonah in the whale's belly? And what "laws of nature" were observed in connection with the birth of Isaac, the feeding of Elijah by the ravens, or the preserving whole the three Hebrews in Babylon's fiery furnace? Yes, God is superior to all means and laws. It is well for us to remember this too.

Third, formidable difficulties and powerful oppositions are encountered in the Warfare of Faith. One will not follow the path of faith very far before he comes face to face with that which challenges all his courage and defies all his natural resources and powers. Jordan rivers and Jericho fortresses still exist. But though the one may be unaffordable and the other appear impregnable, yet

they are the veriest trifles to the Almighty. The dimensions which they assume unto our vision, are largely determined by the measure in which our hearts are engaged with the omnipotent One. Those formidable difficulties and powerful obstacles are placed in our path by God, for the purpose of testing us, for the training of faith, as opportunities to trust in and glorify the Lord.

Fourth, Satan's strongholds cannot stand before a people who are obedient to and who rely fully upon the living God. This fact is surely written in large letters across Joshua 6. The Canaanites were completely under the dominion of the Evil one, yet here we see one of their principal fortresses tumbling down like a frail booth when a powerful wind strikes it. To unbelief these cities might appear "walled up to heaven" and seem impregnable, but faith laughs at such things, knowing that God has only to breathe upon them and they will collapse at once. Thus it was in the early days of Christianity, when the imposing citadels of Paganism crumbled away before the faithful ministry of the apostles. Thus it was at the time of the great Reformation in the sixteenth century, when the kingdom of the Papacy was shaken to its very foundations by the courageous preaching of Luther and his contemporaries. Thus it was, in many parts, some fifty years ago, when the high places of heathendom fell down before onslaughts of the missionaries.

And why is it we are not witnessing the same Gospel triumphs in our generation? Why is it that Romanism has now regained so much of its lost ground, and is forging ahead in so many directions? Why is it that on the "foreign field" the forces of Satan are advancing instead of retreating? And why is it that in the so-called Christian lands a growing number of Jerichos defy the prayers and efforts of the saints? Is it because God's arm is now waxed short? Perish the thought. Is it because the Scriptures are obsolete and unfitted to the needs of this twentieth century? Far from it. What, then, is the matter? This: there is a grieved Spirit in our midst, and in consequence His power is withheld. The Holy Spirit of God has been "quenched" (1 Thess. 5:19), and therefore the feverish and frenzied efforts of present-day Christendom avail not.

And why is the Spirit of God "grieved"? What is it that has "quenched" His power in our midst? This, we have departed from God's way, we have ignored His orders, we have substituted human devices, we have put our confidence in carnal weapons. Instead of

encompassing the walls of Jericho after the Divine order, we have resorted to worldly allurements, seeking to win over the Canaanites by fleshly attractions. My brethren, we cannot hope to have Israel's victories until we emulate Israel's example. We will never again witness a return to apostolic progress until we get back to apostolic methods. There can be no improvement until we truly recognize that it is "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). And the power of the Spirit will not be manifested in our midst until we once more enter the path of obedience, doing God's work in God's prescribed way, and confidently counting upon Him to honor and bless such efforts.

Fifth, but the outstanding lesson to be learned from this incident is that which is stated in our text, where the fall of Jericho is attributed to the faith of the believing Israelites. "Do we think enough of faith, chosen by Divine omnipotent love, to be its channel? God alone doeth great marvels, but it is through the faith of His saints. All the victories of Israel were wrought by faith. Divine power and grace redeemed them on that memorable night; but it was the faith of Moses which kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood. It was God who divided the Red Sea, but in answer to the silent prayer of faith which ascended from the heart of His servant. All miracles of healing recorded in the Gospels were wrought by faith. Jesus prayed to His Father, and then fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes. Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven, and then said 'Ephphatha, Be thou loosed.' Jesus by faith thanked God that He heard Him always, and then uttered His mighty 'Lazarus, come forth.'

"And faith was wrought also in the recipient of Divine favor: 'Thy faith hath healed thee'; 'Be it unto thee as thou hast believed.' Such were frequently Christ's words. The people who perished in the wilderness entered not into God's rest because of unbelief; and because of their unbelief, Jesus could not show many miracles in some places: 'Believe only, and thou shalt see the glory of God.'

"Israel's history is the history of God's omnipotent saving grace and of man's faith. From heaven descend miracles; from earth ascends faith. From the election of Abraham to the birth of Moses, from the passover and the Red Sea to the dividing of the river Jordan, all is miracle, and all has to go through the faith of some chosen saint. Israel is before Jericho, a walled and fenced city; it is

not by power and might, but by faith, that they are to take it" (Adolph Saphir).

Let us consider the various aspects of faith which were manifested by the believing Israelites on this memorable occasion.

1. The daring of their faith. When Israel crossed the Jordan, they, as it were, burned all their bridges and boats behind them. They were cut off from flight; they had no houses to which they could retire, and no fortress to which they could retreat. They were now in the enemy's territory, and victory or death were the only alternatives. To march peacefully and quietly around those walls of Jericho seemed a perilous undertaking: what was to hinder the Canaanites from shooting at or casting down rocks upon them. It was truly an adventure of faith, and it is venturesome faith which God delights to honor. Unbelief is hesitant and timorous, but bold faith is confident and courageous. O to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

There are three degrees of faith. There is a faith which receives, when as empty-handed beggars we come to Christ and accept Him as our Lord and Savior: John 1:12. There is also a faith which reckons, which counts upon God to fulfill His promises and undertake for us: 2 Timothy 1:12. There is also a faith which risks, which dares something for the Lord. This aspect of faith was exemplified by Moses when he ventured to confront the king of Egypt and make known Jehovah's demands. This daring of faith was manifested by David when he went forth to engage the mighty Goliath. We see it again in Elijah, when, single-handed, he encountered the host of Jezebel's false prophets on Carmel. We see it again when Daniel dared to be cast into the lion's den rather than comply with the idolatrous edict of Babylon's king. We see it again and again in the journeys and ministry of the apostle Paul, who flinched not before dangers of every imaginable order, that he might make known the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And in each of the instances mentioned above we behold in the sequel how God honored those trusting and daring hearts. It is venturesome faith which He ever delights to reward. He Himself bids us come to the throne of grace with holy "boldness," that we may find grace to help in time of need. O how this rebukes our timidity and reserve. How few today are prepared to risk anything in the service of our Lord. How little of the courage and daring of our

fathers is now in evidence. What a lot of trembling and fearful soldiers are found today in the army of Christ. O how urgent is the need for some Spirit-filled man of faith to go forth and cry in the language of Carey, "Ask great things of God; expect great things from God; undertake great things for God." It is well to look before we leap, but many look so long that they never leap at all!

2. The obedience of their faith. This appears from a reading of Joshua 6:3, 4 and 6-8: all concerned carried out the Lord's instructions to the letter. To do nothing more than walk and walk and walk around the walls of Jericho must have appeared a childish and ridiculous thing; yet the believing remnant complied with the Lord's command. God promised to deliver Jericho into their hands: Joshua and his believing fellows rested on His word and carried out His orders. The Lord requires us to use whatever means He prescribes, no matter how unlikely and inadequate they may seem to us. It is true that Divine power overthrew Jericho's walls, yet it was also by faith's obedience they fell. God had made it known that the manifestation of His power should be via a particular way; it was inseparably connected with certain actions which were to be performed by His people.

How was Israel to capture that mighty fortress of the Canaanites? Consider their condition! For centuries they had been a nation of slaves. For the last forty years they had been weary wanderers in the wilderness. And now their great leader, Moses, was dead! They were without any military experience, devoid of artillery, and had no trained army. All true; but they were not left to themselves: the living God was for them; and so long as they responded to His revealed will, all went well with them. In like manner God has not left us to our own devisings, but has given us plain and full directions, and He requires us to do the work which He has appointed us in the way He has commanded. Implicit obedience to His orders is absolutely essential if we are to have His blessing.

Implicit obedience unto the known will of God marked all Israel's arrangements for the siege of Jericho. Minute instructions were given them for their strange campaign. They were to march in a certain order, each being required to take the place assigned him. They were to march at a specified hour, and encompass the city a given number of times. At the command of the Lord they were to be

silent, and at the command of the Lord they were to shout. There was no room for human scheming, no place for carnal planning, no need for human reasoning as to what should be done. Everything was prescribed for them, and faith's obedience was all that was required from them. The orders which God gave to Joshua might have seemed unreasonable and absurd to his men, yet they must be faithfully executed if victory was to be theirs. And as it was then, so it is still. But O how slow we are to learn this lesson.

Reader, the commands and precepts of God often appear strange unto carnal wisdom. How absurd did God's orders appear to the great Naaman, when he was bidden to bathe his leprous body in the Jordan. How contrary to all human ideas was it for God to send the prophet Elijah to be fed for many months by a widow who had naught but a handful of meal and a little oil. How unreasonable it must have seemed to the twelve apostles when Christ bade them tell the great multitude to sit down, and only five small loaves and two little fishes were in sight. And how unreasonable does it appear unto multitudes of professing Christians today when they are told to cast away all the worldly devices which have been brought into the "churches" and substitute fasting and prayer. How slow we are to recognize that it is the obedience of faith which God requires.

3. The discipline of their faith. "And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout" (Josh. 6:10). Their silence at the beginning was as necessary as their shouting at the finish. Why? These men were the immediate descendants of the greatest grumblers who ever lived. Their fathers complained and murmured until God swore in His wrath they should not enter into His rest.

How much mischief had been caused if every man had been left free to express his "opinion"! How many would have been ready to advise Joshua what method of strategy to employ. One would have reasoned that the only way to capture Jericho was by starving out its inhabitants through a protracted siege. Another would have suggested the use of ladders to scale its walls. Another would have advocated heavy battering-rams to force a way in. Another would have suggested tunneling under the walls. One and all would have ridiculed the plan which Joshua adopted. Ah, my readers, if the Jerichos which now confront the people of God are to be captured,

then not only must the mouths of murmurers be stopped, but all leaning unto our own understanding must be abandoned.

O how often are the sinews of faith cut by the injudicious and unfriendly criticisms of those who pose as our Christian friends. How often is the man of God hindered by the Christ-dishonoring doubts and carnal suggestion of his fellows. A brother in the Lord, who had been without employment, recently wrote us that he had been rebuked for not making known his needs to his friends. Ah, let us not forget that the very first line which the Holy Spirit gives us in His picture of the "blessed" man is, that he "walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Ps. 1:1). How much mischief is wrought by people perpetually talking of the difficulties in the task confronting us. All real Christian work is beset with difficulties—Satan sees to that!

The soldiers of Christ must be trained: faith must be disciplined: each one in the ranks of the Lord's hosts must learn there is "a time to keep silence and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). The children of Israel were not ordered to go forth in battle array and make any sally upon this garrison of the Canaanites. Instead, in solemn silence, in sacred procession, they were to encompass the city. This was a great trial of faith for such a procedure seemed very unlikely to accomplish the desired end. Not only so, but it would expose them to the contempt of their enemies, who must have sneered at their harmless procession. Yet this was the way which God had ordered: He loves to do great things by contemptible means, that the glory may be His.

4. The patience of their faith: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." They did not fall the first day that Israel marched around them, nor the second, nor the third. No, it was not until they had journeyed about them thirteen times, that the power of God was displayed. And why? To test their patience, as well as their faith and obedience; to prove whether they really believed the Lord's promise or no, when He enjoined the use of such weak and unlikely means; and to give them a more distinct apprehension that the conquest of Canaan was the Lord's, and not theirs. When nothing happened the first twelve times Israel encompassed Jericho, it became the more evident that their enemies would not be overcome by the power of man, but by God.

Not only the mercy, but the timing of it, is in the hands of

God, and therefore are we bidden, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:7). Alas, how sadly do we fail at this point. How easily we become discouraged if our Jericho does not fall the first or second time we encompass it: "the vision is yet for an appointed time... though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come" (Hab. 2:3). But O how impatient is the flesh. It was at this point that Abraham failed: when Sarah bare not the promised son, he determined to have one by Hagar. It was at this point Moses first failed—taking things into his own hands (Ex. 2:11, 12), instead of waiting God's time. "Tarry ye at Jerusalem" was the last word which the Redeemer gave unto the apostles before He ascended.

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). How much we need to take this word to heart: how often we have "fainted" when victory was almost in sight! Ah, we thought that the walls of our Jericho would never fall; but they did, at the appointed time. God is in no hurry, and it is required of us that "he that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa. 28:16). But we find it much harder to wait than we do to believe: that is, probably, the weakest spot in our armor, and the point at which we fail most frequently. Then let us be more definite and earnest in begging the Holy Spirit to work in us the spiritual grace of patience. Let us seek grace to lay hold of that word, "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

5. The anticipation of their faith: "So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Josh. 6:20). Our space is nearly exhausted, so we must condense. What we would now particularly observe is that the people shouted before the walls fell down—it was faith expecting the victory. "What things so-ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive, and ye shall have" (Mark 11:24). It reminds us of the missionary Moffatt, who labored for years among the Bechuanas and saw not a single seal to his ministry. Some of his far-distant friends in England wrote him saying they wished to make a present, and asked him to specify what it should be. He answered "a communion set." Months after, when it arrived, more than a dozen converted natives sat down with him to remember the Lord's death!

How the whole of Joshua 6 has been recorded for our learning. "The walls of unbelief, superstition, and ungodliness, yield to no earthly armor and power. It is not by compulsion, nor by reasoning; it is not by weapons which this world supplies, that these walls can be destroyed. It is by the Word of God, and by the Word declared in faith. Ministers and people, they who blow the trumpet, and also the people who are with them, are to be united together in the power of God" (Adolph Saphir). Each of us is confronted with a Jericho: whether it be the preacher in the field of service where God calls him to labor, the Sunday-school teacher in the call before her, or the individual Christian who is seeking to overcome some habit or disposition. Remember Joshua, and take courage! If there be the daring, the discipline, the obedience, the patience, and the expectation of faith, the victory is sure in God's appointed time.

Once more we have been shown the wondrous power of real faith to bring to pass that which is beyond mere nature: compare Matthew 17:20, 1 John 5:4; persevering trust and obedience enabled Israel to accomplish what had otherwise been impossible. Again, we have seen that faith in God's promise of protection and the use of His appointed means, far surpasses all worldly methods of defense: compare 2 Chronicles 20:20. Contrariwise, we behold what a worthless thing it is to trust in outward and material things: the walls of Jericho were both strong and high, yet they afforded no security against God's power—"vain is the help of man." Though God required Israel to use the utmost of their courage, submission, and patience, yet He took it upon Himself to bless their efforts and effect the work of power. Barriers more difficult than the walls of Jericho stand between the Christian and holiness: how are they to be removed? By faith's obedience; compare 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5.

Hebrews 11:31

Chapter 77 - The Faith of Rahab

The inestimable value of spiritual faith is strikingly demonstrated in the case we are about to consider. The apostle had cited the faith of such illustrious characters as Enoch and Noah, Abraham and Moses; he had mentioned that of a believing company as they had passed through the Red Sea and had marched around Jericho; now he gives an instance of one who had been a notorious sinner, as though to shame us if our faith falls short of her's who had formerly been an harlot. Having shown that the patriarchs, who were so highly venerated by the Jews, were honored by God solely on account of their faith and its fruits, we next behold how an alien woman, belonging to an accursed race, was, because of her faith, adopted into the O. T. Church. "It hence follows that, those who are most exalted are of no account before God, unless they have faith; and that, on the other hand, those who are hardly allowed a place among the profane and the reprobate, are by faith introduced into the company of angels" (John Calvin).

Rahab was a Canaanite, and therefore by nature "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel" and "a stranger from the covenants of promise." In her conversion and admission into the O. T. Church, she was, in a peculiar manner, both a type and a pledge of the calling of the Gentiles and their reception into the Church of Christ in N.T. times. Thus did coming events cast their shadows before them. In such cases as Rahab and Ruth God gave early intimations that His redemptive purpose was not confined to a single people, but that it would reach out unto individuals among all nations. Their incorporation among the Hebrews was a plain foreshadowment of the "wild olive tree" being grafted in and being made a partaker of "the root and fatness of the (good) olive tree" (Rom. 11:17).

The salvation of Rahab was a signal instance of the sovereignty of God. "She was not only a Gentile, but an Amoritess, of that race and seed which in general was devoted unto utter

destruction. She was therefore an instance of God's sovereignty in dispensing with His positive laws, as it seemed good unto Him; for of His own mere pleasure He exempted her from the doom announced against all those of her origin and tradition" (John Owen). Being the supreme Potentate, God is not bound by any law or consideration other than His own imperial will; and therefore does He have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens (Rom. 9:18).

Most blessedly do we also behold here the amazing grace of God. Not only did Rahab belong to a heathen race, but she was an abandoned profligate, a "harlot." In singling her out to be the recipient of His saving favors, God indeed made it evident that He is no respecter of persons. By her own choice she was given up to the vilest of sins, but by the Divine choice she was predestinated to be delivered from that lust which is the most effective in detaining persons under its power, washing her whiter than snow by the precious blood of Christ, and giving her a place in His own family. It is in just such cases that the unmerited favor of God shines forth the more illustriously. There was nothing whatever in this poor fallen woman to commend her unto the favor of God, but where sin abounded grace did much more abound.

Not only may we behold in Rahab's case the exercise of Divine sovereignty and the manifestation of Divine grace, but we may also pause and admire the wondrous working of God's power. This is best perceived as we take into careful consideration the almost unparalleled element which enters into her case. Here the Holy Spirit wrought entirely apart from the ordinary means of grace. There were no Sabbaths observed in Jericho, there were no Scriptures available for reading, there were no prophets sounding forth messages from Heaven; nevertheless, Rahab was quickened into newness of life and brought into a saving knowledge of the true God. Let it be duly noted that this woman, who had previously wallowed in open sin, was regenerated and converted before the spies came to her house: their visit simply afforded an opportunity for the avowal and public manifestation of her faith.

Let us also contemplate the marvelous workings of Divine providence on this occasion. As the two spies, sent forth by Joshua to reconnoiter Jericho, drew near that heathen stronghold, they had no idea that one of God's elect sojourned there; and had they been

aware of the fact, they had no means of knowing how to locate her in a city of such size. Admire and adore, then, the secret hand of God which directed them to the very house in which His child abode. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and in the cloudy and dark day He searches them out. The same God who sent Annanias to the street called "Straight" to deliver Saul from blindness, guided the two spies unto the house of Rahab to deliver her from death. In like manner, wherever there is one or more of His elect amid the darkness of heathendom, He sends His Word or His servants to enlighten and edify the same.

But it is with the faith of Rahab we must be chiefly engaged on this occasion. It will be observed that she is mentioned in Hebrews 11 after the destruction of Jericho, though she "received the spies in peace" before that city was destroyed. The reason for this is because her preservation—which was the fruit of her faith—was after the hosts of Israel had encompassed that city seven days. In seeking to ponder what is recorded in Scripture concerning the faith of Rahab we propose to look separately at the ground, the effect, the nature, the confession, the breadth, the imperfection, and the reward of the same.

1. The ground of her faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). This does not mean that faith is originated by hearing the Word of God, any more than the shining of the sun imparts light unto the eye; no, faith is imparted by a sovereign act of the Spirit, and then it is instructed and nourished by the Word. In the prophetic song of Moses at the Red Sea it was declared, "The people shall hear and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till Thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which Thou hast purchased" (Ex. 15:14-16).

A striking fulfillment of the above prediction is found in the words of Rahab to the two spies: "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites,

that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:9-11). This it is which explains the reference in Hebrews 11:31 unto the other inhabitants of Jericho, who perished because they "believed not." The knowledge which they had of God and His wondrous works, through the reports which had reached their ears, rendered them without excuse.

What has just been before us affords an example of a most solemn fact which is oft repeated: how souls are affected by the Truth, and how quickly the impressions made wear off. The inhabitants of Jericho were deeply stirred by the reports of God's judgments upon the wicked; they feared it was their turn next, and their hearts melted within them. How, then, are we to explain the fact that they did not all of them immediately and earnestly cry unto God for mercy? We believe the answer is found in Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." As the hosts of Israel encompassed Jericho each day and then returned quietly to their camp, space for repentance was granted its inhabitants; but when six days had passed, and the walls of the city remained as strong as ever, they felt quite secure, and hardened their hearts.

How, then, are we to account for the difference in Rahab? In this way: with them it was simply the stirrings of conscience and the workings of their natural fears, which soon subsided; but in her case the power of the Holy Spirit had wrought within her: God had "opened her heart," and consequently she "attended unto the things which were spoken" (Acts 16:14). In other words, Rahab had been sovereignly quickened into newness of life, by which she was capacitated unto a saving knowledge of God Himself and the receiving His word with meekness. Thus it was with the Thessalonian saints, whom the apostle reminded, "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:5). It is only in such cases that a radical and lasting effect is produced.

We must learn, then, to distinguish between three things: the Divine gift of faith, the foundation provided for its support, and the assurance that issues for its resting upon that foundation. The gift of

faith is imparted at regeneration, being one of the attributes of the new nature: "all men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3:2) because all are not born again. The firm foundation which is provided for faith to rest upon is the sure Word of God: by it alone is faith supported—instructed and fed. The assurance which issues from faith's resting upon this foundation is that confidence and certainty which fills the heart when God's Word is received implicitly into it. Thus it was with Rahab. Quickened by the Spirit, faith was planted within her soul, hence when the report reached her of God's wondrous works, she received it "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13), and therefore did she say, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land."

2. The effect of her faith. The faith of God's elect is a living, energetic principle, which "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6) and produces fruit to the glory of God. Herein it differs radically from that notional and inoperative faith of frothy professors, which goes no deeper than an intellectual assenting to certain doctrinal propositions, and ends in fair but empty words. That faith which is unaccompanied by an obedient walk and abounds not in good works, is "dead, being alone" (James 2:17). Different far was the faith of Rahab. Of her we read, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (James 2:25). This does not mean that her good works were the meritorious ground of her acceptance with God, but that they were the evidence before men that a spiritual principle had been communicated to her, the fruits of which justified or vindicated her profession, demonstrating that she was a member of "the Household of Faith."

In "receiving the spies with peace" she made it manifest that she had a heart for the people of God, and was ready to do all in her power to help them. That clause of our text which we are now considering summarizes all that is recorded of her kindly conduct unto those two men in Joshua 2. She welcomed them into her home, engaged them in spiritual conversation, made provision for their safety, hid them from danger, and refused to betray them. We believe there is a latent reference to her kindness (as well as to Abraham's) in Hebrews 13:1-3, for the word translated "messengers" in James 2:25 is the same as is rendered "angels" in Hebrews 13:2: "Let brotherly love continue, Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for

thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body." Alas, that so many professing Christians today, instead of heeding this exhortation, are almost ready to rend each other to pieces over every difference of opinion.

3. The nature of her faith. It was a singular faith. "The city of Jericho was about to be attacked: within its walls there were hosts of people of all classes and characters, and they knew right well that if their city should be set upon and stormed they would all be put to death. But yet strange to say, there was not one of them who repented of sin or who even asked for mercy, except this woman who had been a harlot. She and she alone was delivered, a solitary one amongst a multitude. Now, have you ever felt that it is a very hard thing to have a singular faith? It is the easiest thing in the world to believe as everybody else believes, but the difficulty is to believe a thing alone, when no one else thinks as you think; to be the solitary champion of a righteous cause, when the enemy mustereth his thousands to the battle. Now this was the faith of Rahab. She had not one who felt as she did, who could enter into her feelings and realize the value of her faith. She stood alone. O it is a noble thing to be the lonely follower of despised Truth.

"Rahab's faith was a sanctifying one. Did Rahab continue a harlot after she had faith? No, she did not. I do not believe she was a harlot at the time the men went to her house, though the name still stuck to her, as such ill names will; but I am sure she was not afterwards, for Salmon the prince of Judah married her... You cannot have faith, and yet live in sin. To believe is to be holy. The two things must go together. That faith is a dead faith, a corrupt faith, a rotten faith, which lives in sin that grace may abound. Rahab was a sanctified woman. O that God might sanctify some that are here" (C.H. Spurgeon).

Her's was a self-denying faith. This is seen in her preferring the will of God before the safety of her country, and sheltering these men who were strangers before the pleasing of her fellow-citizens. But it appeared most conspicuously in the venturing of her own life rather than to betray the messengers of Joshua, who were worshippers of the true God. Her action was fraught with the most dangerous consequences to her; but her fidelity to God made her

scorn the threatenings of her citizens, the promiscuous events of war, and the burning of her city. Thus, by faith she, in effect, renounced all for God. When He calls us to do so, we must part with all that we hold near and dear in this world. Spiritual faith is best evidenced by acts of self-denying obedience (condensed from T. Manton).

4. The confession of her faith. This is recorded in Joshua 2:9-11, which shows it was made at the first opening she had. It was quite a comprehensive one: she owned the wondrous works of the Lord, was assured He had given Canaan unto His people, and acknowledged Him as the God of heaven and earth. Thereby she renounced all the idols of the heathen, glorified God with her lips, and illustrated the rule we have in Romans 10:10, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Moreover, by placing the scarlet cord in her window, she, as it were, publicly displayed her colors and made it known under whose banner she had enlisted. How her conduct puts to shame those who after a long profession of the truth are ready to tremble at the first approach of danger, and deem it prudence to keep at a safe distance from those who are exposed to persecution.

"It is in the nature of true, real, saving faith, immediately, or at its first opportunity, to declare and protest itself in confession before men. Our confession is absolutely inseparable from faith. Where men, on some light and convictions, do suppose themselves to have faith, yet, through fear or shame, do not come up to the ways of expressing it in confession prescribed in the scripture, their religion is in vain. And therefore our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Gospel, doth constantly lay the same weight on confession as on believing itself: Matthew 10:33, Luke 9:26. And the fearful, that is, those who fly from public profession in times of danger and persecution, shall be no less assuredly excluded from the heavenly Jerusalem, than unbelievers themselves: Revelation 21:8." (John Owen).

5. The breadth of her faith. Very blessed is it to note her further word to the spies: "Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my

brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death" (Josh. 2:12, 13). Some contracted hearts, in which the very milk of human kindness seems to have congealed, would deem Rahab's request highly presumptuous. Personally, we believe that her soul was so overflowing with gratitude unto the Lord for His saving such an abandoned wretch, that her faith now perceived something of the infinitude of the Divine mercy, and believed that such a God would be willing to show grace unto the whole of her family. Nor was she disappointed.

O that the breadth of Rahab's faith may speak unto our hearts. O that the blessed Holy Spirit may fill us with compassion for our unsaved relatives and friends, and stir us up to wrestle with God in prayer on their behalf. It is right that we should desire God to show mercy unto those who are near and dear to us: not to do so, would show we were lacking in natural affection; it only becomes wrong when we ignore God's sovereignty and dictate instead of supplicate. It is blessed to observe that He who hath said "according unto your faith be it unto you" and "all things are possible unto him that believeth," responded to Rahab's faith, and saved her entire household: though they, of course, only found deliverance by sheltering in the same house with her in which hung the scarlet cord—only under the blood is there safety.

6. The imperfection of her faith. This appears in the reply which she returned to the king of Jericho (recorded in Joshua 2:3-5) when he sent unto Rahab requesting her to deliver up the two spies. Fearful of their lives, she told lies, pretending she knew not whence men had come, and affirming they were no longer in her house. Such a procedure on her part can by no means be justified, for her answer was contrary unto the known truth. The course she followed resembled the direction which Rebekah gave to her son Jacob: in the general her intent was the fruit of great faith, for it had respect unto the promise of God (Gen. 25:33), but in various details (Gen. 27:6, 7, etc.) it can in no wise be approved. The Lord, in His tender mercy, is pleased to pass by many of the infirmities of His children, when He sees an upright heart and a desire to accomplish His promises. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3) God bears with much weakness, especially in the lambs of His flock.

"I observe there was a mixture of infirmity in this act, an

officials lie, which cannot be excused, though God in mercy pardoned it. This is not for our imitation, yet it is for our instruction; and it shows us this, that faith in the beginning hath many weaknesses. Those that have faith do not altogether act out of faith, but there is somewhat of the flesh mingled with that of the spirit. But this is passed by out of God's indulgence; He accepteth us notwithstanding our sins before faith, and notwithstanding our weaknesses in believing. Before faith she was a harlot; in believing she makes a lie. God doth reward the good of our actions and pardon the evil of them, not to encourage us in sinning, but to raise our love to Him who forgives us so great a debt, receives us graciously, and pardons our manifold weaknesses" (T. Manton).

It is blessed to see that neither in our text nor in James 2:25 does the Holy Spirit make any reference unto Rahab's failure; instead, in both places, He mentions that which was praiseworthy, and to her credit. It is the very opposite with the malevolent world, which is ever ready to overlook the good and reflect only upon the evil of an action performed by a child of God. It is a gracious spirit which throws the mantle of charity over the deformities and defects in a brother or sister in Christ, as it is honoring to God to dwell upon that which His Holy Spirit has wrought in them. If we were quicker to judge ourselves for our own sad failures, we would not be so ready to blaze abroad the faults of our fellows. Let each of us seek grace to heed that exhortation, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

7. The reward of her faith. "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not." The historical account of this is found in Joshua 6:22, 23, "But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel."

But not only was Rahab, and the whole of her family, preserved from the burning of Jericho which immediately followed,

but as Joshua 6:25 tells us, she "dwelt in Israel." Thus, from being the slave of Satan she was adopted into the family of God; from being a citizen of heathen Jericho she was given a place in the congregation of the Lord. Nor was that all; later, she became the honored wife of a prince in Judah, the mother of Boaz, and one of the grandmothers of David. Her name is inscribed upon the imperishable scroll of sacred history; it is recorded in Matthew 1 among the ancestresses of the Savior—she was one of the mothers of Jesus! From what depths of sin and shame did sovereign grace deliver this poor woman; to what a height of honor and dignity did sovereign grace elevate her. Truly, the rewards of faith are most excellent and glorious.

Hebrews 11:32

Chapter 78 - The Faith of the Judges

In some respects the verse we have now arrived at is the most difficult one in our chapter. It commences the last division of the same. Therein the apostle changes his method of treatment, and instead of particularizing individual examples of faith, he groups together a number of men and summarizes the actings of their faith. The selection made, out of many others who could have been given, is most startling: those whose names we might have expected had been registered on this honor roll are omitted, while others we have never thought of are given a place. The order in which they are recorded seems strange, for it is not that of the chronological. This has puzzled some: one eminent commentator stating "The apostle does not observe strict order, reciting them in haste": which is not to be allowed for a moment, for it ignores the superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit. Again; "the prodigies performed by these men cannot be presented for our emulation": why, then, are they referred to?

The principle of guidance in the selection of some of the men here mentioned is obviously that of sovereign grace: no otherwise can we account for the passing over of such illustrious characters as Caleb and Deborah, Hannah and Asaph, and the inclusion of Jephthah and Samson—in the latter the free favor of God was more conspicuously displayed. The order in which they are mentioned is not that of time, but of dignity, for Barak lived before Gideon, Jephthah before Samson, and Samuel before David: God reckons those most excellent who bring forth the best fruits of faith—the more we excell in faith, the more God will honor us. Where faith shines the brightest the least are accounted the greatest, and the last become first; then how we should labor daily for an increase of faith.

Five of the six men named in our text were judges who ruled over Israel, though they came from very humble callings. From this we may learn that faith is a spiritual grace suited not only unto the

temple, but also to the judicial bench and throne; that it is needed not only by those who occupy positions in the private walks of life, but also by those who fill public office. Governors equally with the governed require to have a true faith in the living God: instead of disqualifying them for the discharge of their important duties, it would be of inestimable value to them—enabling them to face difficulties and dangers with calmness, inspiring with courage, endowing with wisdom, and preserving from many temptations which confront those in high places. He who is blest with a spiritual faith will have lowly thoughts of himself, as had Barak, Gideon, and David.

Remarkable achievements are credited to the men whose names are now before us. As we read the historical account of them in the book of Judges we may well marvel at them, but it is only as we view them in the light of what is said here in Hebrews 11 that we shall understand them aright. Other men besides these have vanquished lions, put armies to flight, and subdued kingdoms; yet their deeds proceeded from a very different principle. The mighty works of men chronicled in the Old Testament are given for a higher purpose than the indulging of our love of the sensational. The exploits of Gideon and Barak, Samson and David, are only recorded in Holy writ as they were wrought by faith: thus the Holy Spirit honors His own work.

One prominent feature which distinguishes many of the extraordinary performances of men of God set down in Scripture from the prodigies done by men of the world is, that the Holy Spirit moved the sacred historians to faithfully register the infirmities under which faith so often wrought and the weakness which preceded it. The faith of these men was very far from being perfect, either in degree, stability, or unmixed purity. Like ours so often is, their faith was mingled with fear, oppressed by unbelief, hard beset by carnal reasonings. We have only to read through the 6th of Judges to see that the faith of the first one named in our text was painfully slow in exercise, though by grace, it was afterward mighty in execution. They were men of like passions with us, and from that fact we may take comfort—not in sheltering behind the same, but by refusing to despair when our faith is at a low ebb.

One thing which is common to all the individuals mentioned in our text is that the history of each of them was cast in a day of

great spiritual declension. The time in which they lived is described at length in the book of Judges. Following the deaths of Moses and Joshua, Israel grievously departed from the Lord: cast off His law, worshipped the idols of the heathen, and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes"

(Judg. 21:25); darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Yet even in those days God left not Himself without witness: inexpressibly blessed is it to behold the faith of individuals shining in the midst of a failed testimony; that here and there was a lamp maintained, illuminating the surrounding darkness. Nor is the number here specified without significance for to the six individuals mentioned are linked the "prophets" (who also ministered in seasons of apostasy), making seven in all—telling of the completeness of the provision made by the grace of God.

Thus we may see how that Hebrews 11, which describes at length the Life of Faith, would have been incomplete had no notice been taken of those times when Israel so grievously departed from God. It was during seasons of great spiritual darkness and gloom that faith wrought many of its mightiest works and achieved some of its most notable victories. For faith is not dependent on favorable outward conditions; it is sustained and energized by One who is infinitely superior to all circumstances. What is mentioned in our text and the verses which immediately follow, is recorded for our encouragement. We too are living in a day when Christendom is in a sad state, when there is widespread departure from God and His Word, when vital and practical holiness is at a low ebb. But the arm of the Lord is not waxed short, and they who lean hard upon it shall be sustained and enabled to do exploits in His name.

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthath, of David also, and Samuel and of the prophets" (verse 32). The apostle had already given abundant proof that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (verse 1), and had shown that "by it the elders obtained a good report" (verse 2); yet he had by no means said all which might be given on the subject. Numerous and notable examples of the power and fruits of faith had been advanced, and many others might still be cited; but it would not be convenient to enumerate each instance of faith recorded in the O.T. To have done so, would extend the epistle beyond due limits: so

we now have a bare mention of the names of others, followed by a description in general terms of the effects of their faith.

The characters which we are now to contemplate, like the apostles of Christ, and in smaller measure the reformers at the close of the "Dark Ages," were extraordinary men, specially raised up by God in times of crisis, for the good of His Church and the benefit of the commonwealth. This needs to be carefully borne in mind, or otherwise we shall view them in a false perspective. Their calling was extraordinary, and so were their performances. They were endowed with uncommon powers, and supernaturally energized for their particular tasks. That which distinguished them from men like Caesar, Charlemagne and Napoleon, was that they were men of faith. It is not that the apostle by any means commends all that they did, or that he excuses their manifold imperfections, which cannot be vindicated; he makes mention here only of their faith.

Gideon was raised up by God at a time when Israel's fortunes were sunk to a low ebb. Three judges had preceded him, delivering the people of God from the hand of their enemies; but a fourth time they had apostatized, and now they were groaning under the servitude of the Midianites. So great was the number of those who had invaded their territory, that they "left no sustenance for Israel" and "Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites" (Judg. 6:4, 6). But that was not the worst: the worship of Baal prevailed to such an extent among the favored covenant people of God, that to oppose it was considered a criminal act, deserving of death (Judg. 6:28-30). Nevertheless God had promised "the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone" (Deut. 32:36), and now, once again, He was about to make good this word.

To be delivered from the dire situation which now faced Israel, called for a "mighty man of valor," and such was Gideon, as we learn from the language in which the angel of the Lord first addressed him (Judg. 6:12). But something more than natural courage and daring was required in the one whom the Lord would employ—he must be an humble man of God, that the glory might rebound unto Him alone. In order to that, the instrument had first to be prepared for the tasks to be performed—the servant fitted for the service he must do. "God must first do His work with Gideon, before Gideon could do his work for God. To accomplish this, God

makes the wine-press of Joash to be to Gideon what He made the backside of the desert to be to Moses" (E.W.B.). The servant of God must first be made to feel his weakness, before he is taught that all-sufficient strength is available for him in the Lord. Thus it was with Gideon; thus it is still.

It is blessed to observe the Lord's dealings with Gideon: He now said "Jehovah is with thee" (Judg. 6:12). This was to exercise his heart, which is ever the prime requisite. Aroused, Gideon enquired, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of?" etc. (verse 13). Second "the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee!" (verse 14). It is at this point so many interpreters go astray in their understanding of this incident. The saint's "might" is in realized helplessness: "For when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). That word of Jehovah's was designed to bring Gideon to the consciousness of his own utter inability to deliver Israel from the yoke of the Midianites.

The instrument must be experimentally fitted ere the Lord will employ it in His service; and the first part of this fitting process is to empty it of self-sufficiency that it may then be thoroughly dependent upon Himself. Gideon's "might" consisted in conscious weakness, and as soon as that was realized he would be forced to believe the Lord's declaration "Thou shalt save Israel." That was the word addressed to his heart, and was the foundation on which his faith was to rest. Gideon now asked, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (verse 15): the Divine arrow had hit its mark, as Gideon's humble confession attests.

The Lord has only one response unto acknowledged helplessness: "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (verse 16). How blessed! When faith truly realizes this, it exclaims, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). From that assuring word of the Almighty Gideon knew that he had "found grace" in His sight, and asked for a sign: "Not because he doubted, but because he believed; not to prove the truth of Jehovah's word, but because he would prove the truth of Jehovah's grace, in the acceptance of his offerings which he proposed to go and fetch:" verses 17, 18 (E.W.B.).

Next, Gideon prepared and presented his offering (verse 19), and was bidden to place the same upon a rock (verse 20). This was followed by a miracle, fire issuing from the rock and consuming the offering, by which he "obtained witness" that he had found grace in Jehovah's sight—the supernatural fire denoting his acceptance with God, filling him with awe and terror. Immediately the Lord quieted his heart with, "Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die" (verse 23): thus did he receive Jehovah's blessing: that Gideon's faith laid hold of that benediction is very evident from the next verse, "Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom"—"The Lord send peace."

The heart of Gideon being now fitted and established, God gave him his first commission: "Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place; and take the second bullock and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down" (verses 25, 26). Such definiteness of language at once evidenced to Gideon that he had to do with One who knew everything—the bullocks his father had, and their very ages. Like his father Abraham, Gideon believed God and obeyed His command, for we read that, "It came to pass the same night... Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord commanded." At this distant date, his action may seem to us trivial, but the sequel shows that Gideon acted at the imminent peril of his life: "Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cut down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it" (verse 30).

The immediate sequel supplied a much more severe testing of Gideon: "Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the East were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel" (verse 33). Enraged at the overthrow of the altar of Baal, the Midianites gathered their forces together and with their allies came up against Israel for battle. It is to be expected that Satan will wax furious when his territory is invaded and the Lord is magnified in the place where he has reigned supreme: that is why it so often follows that when a Christian has done his duty, it seems as though he has only made bad matters worse, by increasing

his troubles. Then it is that he is sorely tempted to regret he has been so 'radical' in his conduct and to effect a compromise. Such a temptation is to be steadfastly resisted. More; the increasing troubles which faithfulness brings upon him, are to be regarded as a golden opportunity for further exercises and acts of faith. Thus Gideon acted, and so should we.

We cannot now enter into a detailed comment upon the response made by Gideon to the open menace of the Midianites, and all that is recorded of him in Judges 6-8, but we commend those chapters unto the careful pondering of the reader. Let him carefully note, first, that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon" (Judg. 6:34), which supplies the key to all that follows: safeguarding the glory of God (preventing us from ascribing the honor to Gideon), and furnishing the vital word of instruction for our own hearts. We cannot overcome Satan nor refuse his temptation in our own strength. We cannot increase faith, or even maintain it in exercise, by any resolution of mind or act of our own will. We cannot achieve victories to the praise of our God by our own faithfulness. It is only as we are strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, that we are furnished for the battle against the forces of evil; and that strength is to be definitely, diligently, and trustfully sought.

The infirmities of Gideon appear in that he imagined he must head a large army if the Midianites were to be vanquished: it was only little by little that his heart was instructed, and the lesson was learned that God is not dependent upon numbers. His repeated request for confirmatory signs (Judg. 6:36-40) also shows us that it is not all at once the saint learns to walk by faith and not by sight. But the Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, and bears with our infirmities when the heart is truly upright before Him. He granted Gideon the signs requested, though that is no guarantee He will do so for us; and He corrected his notion that a large force was needed: only a small fragment was employed—"by the three hundred men that lapped will I save you" (Judg. 7:7). Then, when Gideon believed the Lord and obeyed His orders, this word was given, "Arise get thee down unto the host, for I have delivered it into thine hand" (Judg. 7:9), which was completely verified in the sequel. Thus did the Lord use and work mightily by one who was poor and little in his own eyes (Judg. 6:15), and who "did as the Lord had said unto him" (Judg. 6:27).

Barak. Time (or space) fails us to enter into a full consideration of his history and exploits, so we must condense. Barak was raised up by God near the close of the twenty years when Jabin the king of Canaan "mightily oppressed the children of Israel" (Judg. 4:3). Deborah was acting as judge at that time—proof of the terribly low state into which the covenant people had fallen (cf. Isaiah 3:12); though she was not a "judge" in the proper sense of the term (see Judges 4:3 and carefully compare Judges 2:18), but a "prophetess," and therefore a mouthpiece of God. It was through her that the Lord spake to Barak, saying "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphthali and of the children of Zebulun? And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand" (Judg. 4:6, 7): that was to be the ground of Barak's faith, that was the sure promise which described the thing to be "hoped for." The infirmity of Barak is seen in Judges 4:8, but the obedience of his faith appears in Judges 4:10. A further word was given to him, "Up, for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee!" (Judg. 4:14): he "heard," "believed," and obeyed, and a great victory was secured. It was by faith in God's promise that Barak went forth against the enormous army of Sisera and vanquished the same.

Samson. Many mighty deeds are recorded of him in the book of Judges, such as his rending to pieces a lion, as though it had been a kid; his slaying of a thousand Philistines, single-handed, with the jawbone of an ass; his carrying of the gates of Gaza and their posts on his shoulders up a steep hill; his bursting asunder the strongest cords when bound by his enemies; his overturning the pillars on which stood the great temple of Dagon. How, then, did Samson perform these prodigies? By faith. In the O.T. it is said, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him," but that does not mean he was involuntarily impelled by a Divine power, like a hurricane carries things through the air blindly and unwittingly. No, the Spirit deals with men not as stocks and stones, but as moral agents; enlightening their minds, controlling their hearts, inclining their wills, and supplying physical strength for whatever tasks God allots.

"Faith cometh by hearing," and in Samson's case he "heard"

through his parents the promise which God had made concerning him: "he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judg. 13:5). The strength of his mother's faith comes out beautifully in 13:23, where, quieting the fear of her husband, she said, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." Brought up in the strong faith of his parents, Samson believed what he "heard" from God through them, grew up in the confidence of the same and conducted himself accordingly. His last act was his greatest and best, furnishing the strongest evidence of his faith in God and being of most profit to His church. After being so sorely chastened for his sins, and considering the situation he was then in, it called for no ordinary confidence in the Lord to do what is recorded in Judges 16:28-30.

Jephthah. By calling, Gideon was a farmer, Barak a soldier, Samson a religious Nazarite, while David was the youngest of his family and despised by his brethren; Samuel was first used by God while still a child; thus we may see how God delights to use lowly and weak instruments. But more striking still is the case now before us: Jephthah was one of dishonorable birth, a bastard (Heb. 11:1, 2) which the law excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2). Yet God, in an especial and extraordinary manner conferred His Spirit upon Jephthah and advanced him to the highest dignity and function amongst His people and prospered him exceedingly. From this we may learn that no outward condition, be it ever so base, can serve as a hindrance to God's grace. That he was a man who feared the Lord is clear from Judges 11:9, 10. His message to the king of Ammon (Judg. 11:14-27) shows that he believed what was recorded in the Scripture of Truth: he ascribed Israel's victories to the Lord (verses 21, 23) and called on Him to judge between Israel and Ammon (verse 27); and Jehovah rewarded his faith by delivering the Ammonites into his hand. His fidelity and perseverance in the faith is seen in the keeping of his vow of banning his daughter to continual virginity.

David. There is little need for us to attempt here an enumeration of the many works and fruits of his faith, nor to point out how often unbelief wrought within and through him. We agree with John Brown that it is likely the Holy Spirit has particular

reference in our text unto David's victorious combat with Goliath, when, quite a youth, and totally inexperienced in the arts and guiles of warfare, armed only with a sling and a few pebbles, he engaged in open fight the mighty giant of the Philistines, who was a veteran in the field and heavily armed for the duel. How are we to explain David's temerity and success? In this way: he had received a revelation from God (as 1 Samuel 17:46, 47 plainly intimates), he rested on the same with implicit confidence, and acted accordingly. By faith he ventured; by faith he overcame.

Samuel. "The event to which we are disposed to think it most probable, from its miraculous character, that the apostle refers, is that recorded in 1 Samuel 12:16-18: 'Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat-harvest today, I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.' A revelation was made to Samuel that the Divine power was to be put forth in connection with certain words which he spoke. He believed that revelation; he spoke the words, and the event followed" (John Brown).

The Prophets. They too exemplified the power of faith, both in what they did and in what they suffered. By faith they were enabled to achieve and to endure what otherwise they could not have achieved or endured. They delivered nothing but what they received: hence the frequency of their announcement, "Thus saith the Lord." They concealed nothing they had received: though it was a "burden" to them (Mal. 1:1, etc.), and though they knew full well their message would be most unpalatable, they faithfully delivered the Word of God. They were undaunted by the people's opposition, setting their face as a flint (Ezek. 3:8, 9). They humbly submitted to God's requirements: Isaiah 20:3, Jeremiah 27:2, Ezekiel 4:11, 12. They wrought mighty works, especially Elijah and Elisha. All these things manifested the efficacy and might of a real faith in the living God. "Lord, increase our faith."

Hebrews 11:33, 34

Chapter 79 - The Achievements of Faith

True faith performs a prominent part in all experimental godliness. Where there is a total absence of the grace of faith, a man is without God and without hope in this world; but where that spiritual principle exists, if only in the very small degree, there has taken place a wondrous and miraculous change. The one who is the subject of it may not, for a time, understand its nature; but instead, make the greatest mistakes about it; nevertheless, that change is no less than one passing from death unto life. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed" (Matthew 17:20): that little grain has a principle of life in it, and contains in embryo the future plant; so with the implanting of the principle of grace in the heart—it will yet develop into, or rather be consummated in, Glory.

It behooves each one of us to take diligent pains in ascertaining the origin of our faith. There are various kinds of faith spoken of in the Scriptures: there is a dead faith, a demon's faith, a fancied and forced faith, a creature and presumptuous faith—all of which are to be dreaded, for they come not from above. But spiritual faith is Divine in its origin: "it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). True faith is no offspring of nature, but has a celestial birth: "every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). Spiritual faith is the heart's persuasion of the Truth of God, and is produced in us by the almighty creative power of the Holy Spirit, when He applies the Word in life-giving energy to the soul.

Now this faith is not only Divinely-communicated, but it is Divinely-sustained. Spiritual faith is neither self-sustained nor man-sustained. It does not support itself, nor does its possessor support it. It depends entirely upon God. Alas, alas the "faith" of the vast majority of professing Christians, instead of being of this self-helpless nature, fills them with a deceiving self-ability. Nothing is so dependent upon God in Christ; nothing so utterly unable to live without the Spirit's supporting power, as that faith which He

Himself produces in the heart. But the "faith" of multitudes today is of a totally different nature, and we might accommodate and apply to them those words of Paul's, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings"—but without the Spirit.

This faith is not only Divinely-given and Divinely-sustained, but it is also Divinely-energized: it acts only by the quickening power of God. "Without Me," said Christ, "ye can do nothing" (John 15:5); then, certainly, without His enablement we cannot act faith upon Himself or His promises. But a spurious faith, springing up out of mere nature, self-made and self-supporting, is also a self-acting one. The possessors of it can believe when they like, as they like, and what they like. There is Christ, they can lay hold of Him. There are His promises: they can appropriate them. There are His offices: they can act faith upon them. Alas, such ability savors nothing of the faith which God gives to His people, and which causes them to lie at the footstool of His mercy as humble supplicants.

This faith is also Divinely-increased: "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). But let it be pointed out that such an "increase" does not render the Christian less dependent upon the Spirit of God—that would be a miserable increase: like the prodigal son getting his portion of goods and setting up for himself. Nor is it such an increase that now remains at one level, always acting with a certain power, always in the same lively exercise. Far from it; real Christians know from painful experience how often their faith is at a low ebb, and when apparently the most needed, is the worst crippled in its actings. Nor is it such an increase that its possessors should necessarily be conscious of it. Moses knew not that his face shone. Most probably the centurion and the Canaanitish woman little thought that they had "great faith." Sometimes those who have the most faith feel they have very little, if any at all; while sometimes those who have little, say they are rich and increased with goods.

In what, then, does an increase of faith consist? Is not the Christian's growth, as a believer, a growth in a true, living, spiritual, experimental knowledge of himself as a sinner, and of God in Christ as the Father of mercies? Faith is fed by knowledge: not by mere notions in the brain, for those only feed a false and presumptuous confidence; but by a spiritual and Divine knowledge. As this knowledge increases, faith increases; as this knowledge is confirmed in the soul, faith is confirmed and strengthened. "Blessed is the man

whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law" (Ps. 94:12). Again; "He led him about, He instructed him" (Deut. 32:10): God leads into a great variety of circumstances, and in these circumstances He causes His people to receive instruction. In that way they learn the truth in an experimental manner, and what they receive from the Word is confirmed more and more unto them. In that way they learn the vanity of the world, the fickleness of the creature, the depravity of their own hearts.

Now this Divinely-given and Divinely-supported faith is renewed or stirred into exercise by the operations of the Holy Spirit, and brings forth fruit "after its own kind"; that is, fruit which is spiritual in its nature and supernatural in its character. In other words, faith is an active principle: it "worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). As it is energized by its Giver, it produces that which mere human nature is utterly incapable of producing. An unmistakable proof of this is seen in our present verses, where we read, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. 11:33, 34).

There are two ways in which the remarkable contents of these verses may be considered: according as we look at their letter in a natural way, or according as we ponder them with an anointed eye. Water will not rise above its own level: the heart of the natural man being a stranger to spiritual things, cannot discern them when they are spread before him—that is why the majority of the commentaries are so largely devoted to the historical, grammatical, and geographical details of Scripture. There is an historical allusion in each clause of our text, but what the true Christian desires, is to know the spiritual purport and the practical application of them unto himself. Only thus do the Scriptures become a living Word unto him. This is what we have sought to keep steadily in mind as we have passed from verse to verse of Hebrews 11, and which we will endeavor to be occupied with now.

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms." The opening word takes us back to the list of worthies mentioned in the preceding verse, and here we are supplied with an enumeration of some of the wonderful works performed by them: nine fruits of their faith are

mentioned—compare the nine-fold "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22, 23. Therein we behold once more the marvelous and miraculous efficacy of a spiritual faith. "These instances are taken from things of all sorts to show that there is nothing of any kind whatever wherein we may be concerned but that faith will be useful and helpful" (John Owen). No matter what our lot may be—"pleasing or painful"; no matter what station we are called to fill—high or low; no matter how formidable or difficult the obstacles which confront us, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

"Through faith subdued kingdoms." The word here used for "subdue" means "to fight or contend, to enter into a trial of strength, of courage on the field, to prevail in battle." The historical allusion is to the exploits of Joshua and David: "Joshua subdued the kingdoms in Canaan, and David subdued those which were around that country, such as Moab, Ammon and Syria; and they both subdued these kingdoms through believing" (J. Brown). The important point to recognize is that the "kingdoms" here "subdued" were those which sought to prevent the people of God (Israel) from entering into and enjoying their rightful inheritance. Now let us spiritualize that fact. The Christian has been begotten "unto an inheritance" (1 Pet. 1:3, 4): that "inheritance" is to be enjoyed now, by faith, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But there are powerful enemies seeking to harass and hinder us, and they must be "subdued."

There are two principal "kingdoms" which the Christian is called upon to "subdue": one is within himself, the other without him—the "flesh" and the "world." It was to the former of these that the apostle had reference when he said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27). The same task is set before the Christian: "For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. 6:19). The "flesh" or sinful nature within us must be "subdued," or it will certainly slay us—bring about our eternal undoing: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13).

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). Does

the reader exclaim, Such a task is a hopeless one! Joshua might have said the same when he first set foot in Canaan, and found it occupied with a powerful and hostile people. And, my reader, Joshua did not "subdue" them in a day, nor in a year! No, it was accomplished little by little. It meant fierce fighting, it meant the exercise of much courage and patience, it meant surmounting varied discouragements; but at the end God crowned his labors with success. And remember that it was by faith he "subdued kingdoms." Ah, faith looks to God and draws vigor and strength from Him. True, I am weak and impatient in myself, yet "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

There is also a "kingdom" without, which the Christian must "subdue," or else he will be destroyed by it: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). And how is the "world" to be "subdued?" 1 John 5:4 gives us the answer: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith." Sweetly is this signified in the Song of Solomon: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?" (Song 8:5). Here the child of God, though toiling and struggling, worn and weary, is represented as rising above the world. And how is this accomplished? How is it that the spouse of Christ is enabled to rise above the immense hindrance of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"—those things which are "in the world" (1 John 2:16)? She is seen "leaning upon her Beloved" (Song 8:5). As He is our object, the world loses its power over us; as He is our strength, we get the victory over it.

"Wrought righteousness." In their narrower sense, these words signify "to execute judgment, to enforce the laws of justice:" the historical reference would then be to such passages as Joshua 11: 10-15, 1 Samuel 24:10, 2 Samuel 8:15. But in its wider scope "wrought righteousness" means the living of a holy life: "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:1, 2). "In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:35). "Righteousness" signifies up to the required standard; and to work righteousness means, walking according to the rule of God's Word: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Now right actions must spring from right principles and must be performed with right ends, if they are to be acceptable to God. In other words, they must issue from a living faith and have in view the glory of God. It is the absence of faith and the substituting of self-interest for the honor of the Lord, which is the cause of all the injustice and oppression in the world today. But let it now be carefully noted that "subdued kingdoms" precedes "wrought righteousness." This order is unchanging: evil must be hated before good can be loved (Amos 5:15), self must be denied before Christ can be followed (Matthew 16:24), the old man must be put off before the new man can be put on (Eph. 4:22-24). In other words, the "flesh" must be mortified before the "spirit" can be manifested.

"Obtained promises," or secured the blessings promised. God assured Joshua that he should conquer Canaan, Gideon that he should defeat the Midianites, David that he should be king over all Israel. But outwardly, tremendous difficulties stood in the way of the accomplishment of those things, yea, apparent impossibilities prevented them. Gideon was put upon a great improbability when he was commanded to take but three hundred men, fall upon and destroy an immense host. David and his little company seemed to be no match for the armed forces of Saul, and after his death, for years the throne seemed as far away as ever. But where there is a real trust in the living God the most formidable difficulties may be overcome.

"Obtained promises." Ah, it is one thing to hear and read about the wonderful things which the faith of others secures, but what about your own experience, dear reader? You may sincerely think that you believe in and are resting upon the sure promises of God, but are you obtaining a fulfillment of them in your own daily life? Are the blessings set forth in the promises actually in your possession? Are you securing the things promised? If not, is the reason to be found in your failure to heed what here precedes? Before "obtained promises" comes "subdued kingdoms" and then "wrought righteousness." We must not expect to "obtain" the precious things set before us in the promises until we definitely and diligently set about the subjugation of the flesh, and walk according to the rules of God's Word—regulating our conduct by its precepts and commands.

"Stopped the mouths of lions." The historical reference is, of course, to Daniel in the den. It shows again the marvelous power of

faith. This comes out clearly in Daniel 6:23: "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God." But how far may this be of help to us? Is the answer far to seek? There are ferocious people, as well as fierce animals! There are savage oppressors and persecutors who seek to intimidate, if not destroy, the mild and harmless Christian. True, yet they should not terrify us, still less spoil our testimony, by causing us to hide our light under a bushel. Daniel would not be forced into compromising by the threat of the lions of Babylon, nor should we be by the menacing looks, words, and actions of the world's lions today. Say with one of old, "I will trust and not be afraid."

"Stopped the mouths of lions." Why it almost looks as though faith were omnipotent! What cannot real faith do! We dare not set any limitations to it, for faith has to do with the living God, and nothing is too hard for Him. Ah, dear reader, faith lays hold of the Almighty, and not until your faith learns to do that, is it of much worth. Is the Lord God a living reality to you, or do you have but a theoretical knowledge of Him? The ultimate reference in our text is to him of whom it is said, "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). His mouth is opened against many a child of God, uttering lies, telling him that his profession is an empty one. Have you learned to "stop his mouth?" Do his false accusations no longer terrify you? Does he now find it useless to thus harass you any longer? It all depends: "stopped the mouths of lions" is preceded by "obtained promises"!

"Quenched the violence of fire." The reference is to the three Hebrews in Babylon's furnace. It shows the efficacy of faith to rest upon the power of God in the face of great danger, yea, before what seemed to be certain death. Those three Hebrews resolved to perform their duty, no matter what the event, committing themselves unto the disposition of a sovereign God, with full persuasion of His power to do whatever He pleased, and which would be most for His glory. Such an exercise of faith appears very, very marvelous to us. Ah, let it be fully borne in mind that Daniel and his fellows trusted God in times of peace and prosperity, as well as in seasons of peril and adversity. If we live by faith, it will not be difficult to die by faith.

"Quenched the violence of fire." A twofold spiritual

application may be made of these words. First, we read of "the fiery darts of the wicked" (Eph. 6:16), and these are to be "quenched" by "taking the shield of faith." If we are subduing kingdoms, working righteousness, and obtaining promises, neither the mouth of the lion will be able to intimidate us, nor the temptations of the devil overcome us. Second, we read of faith which is "tried with fire" (1 Pet. 1:7) or fierce afflictions: this fire (like Babylon's) is not "put out," but its "violence" or power to injure, is "quenched." If the soul cleaves to God naught can harm it. It is faith, and not water, which quenches the fire: behold the martyrs singing amid the flames!

"Escaped the edge of the sword." The historical reference is to such passages as 1 Samuel 18:4, 1 Kings 18:10, 19:1-3, Jeremiah 39:15-18: in several of which it seems as though those eminent servants of God escaped from danger more by fear than by faith—by fleeing from those who threatened their lives. The life of faith is many-sided, and care needs to be taken to preserve the balance: to keep from mere passivity on the one hand, and from fanatical presumption on the other. While the Christian is to walk by faith, yet there is wrestling (Eph. 6:12) and fighting to be done (1 Tim. 6:12); we are to seek grace and develop all heroic virtues, such as courage, valor, hardness (2 Tim. 2:3), and endeavor by Divine aid to overcome everything which hinders us entering into God's best. On the other side, the Christian must not refuse the use and aid of all lawful means in times of danger: "when they persecute you in this city flee ye into another" (Matthew 10:23)—to refuse to do so, is not faith, but presumption.

"Escaped the edge of the sword." What is the deeper meaning of this? Our minds at once turn to Hebrews 4:12, "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword": confirmation of this is found in the fact that the Greek of our text reads "Escaped the edges of the sword." But how is the Christian to "escape" the edges of the Spirit's Sword? By being in practical subjection to the precepts of Scripture, walking in communion with God. It is when we get into a backslidden state and give way to the lusts of the flesh, that the Word condemns our ways, pierces our conscience, and strikes terror to our hearts. God does not wound or afflict "willingly" (Lam. 3:33), but only when our conduct is displeasing to Him. If our hearts be right with God, His Word will strengthen and comfort, rather than cut and wound us. If we judge

ourselves for all that is wrong, the Sword will not smite us; when we fail to, the Word searches and convicts us. Note Revelation 19:15, where the same figure of the "sharp sword" is seen in Christ's mouth as he comes forth to destroy His enemies!

"Out of weakness were made strong." In those words there may be a latent reference to Samson in the dosing scene of his life, but most probably the historical allusion is unto Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 20:1 we are told that Hezekiah was "sick unto death," and then that he prayed unto the Lord, which was in marked contrast from Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:2) and Asa (2 Chron. 16:12). 2 Kings 20:3 is much misunderstood: the key to it is found in 1 Kings 2:4. Hezekiah was conscious of his integrity, and sincere desire to please God, but he had no son to succeed him to the throne, and therefore did he here call to mind His promise. The Lord responded to his faith, restored him to health, added fifteen years to his life, and gave him a son.

"Out of weakness were made strong." It is not simply that "the weak were strengthened," but "out of weakness were made strong," the emphasis being upon an extremity of feebleness. It shows us that the vigor of faith is not dependent upon health of the body! It is written "The prayer of faith (not the "anointing" of the "elders") shall save the sick" (James 5:15 and cf. Philippians 2:27). But our text is not to be restricted to physical "weakness;" God is able to make the doctrinally and spiritually weak to stand: Romans 14:4. The secret of the Christian's strength lies in maintaining a consciousness of his weakness (2 Cor. 12:10). The trouble is that as we grow older, most of us grow more independent and self-sufficient. The fact is that the oldest Christian has no more strength in himself than he had when he was but a "babe in Christ." Just so soon as we fail to feel and acknowledge before God our personal weakness, do we fail to prove the sufficiency of God's grace! Seek strength from Him daily.

"Waxed valiant in fight." Probably the reference is to Samson (Judg. 15:15) and David. The phrase signifies that these heroes of faith refused to be intimidated by the might and number of their enemies; undaunted by the great odds against them, they refused to give way to a spirit of cowardice, and entered into a pitched battle against their foes: compare Deuteronomy 31:23, Joshua 1:7, Psalm 3:6, Acts 4:29. Once again we would stress the

importance of the order here: "waxed valiant in fight" is preceded by "out of weakness were made strong!" and that in turn by "escaped the edge of the Sword"! May we not easily perceive here why it is that we are so quickly and so frequently overcome by our spiritual foes?

"Turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Such passages as Joshua 10:1-10 and 2 Samuel 5:17-25 may be consulted for typical illustrations of what is here in view, carefully bearing in mind that while the power of God, giving success to the efforts of Joshua and David, was the efficient cause of their victories, yet instrumentally, it was "through faith" they were wrought. The path of faith is one of conflict because the Adversary contests every step of the way. The chief reason why the individual Christian experiences so little victory in his spiritual warfare, is because his faith is so little in exercise. And we may add, the chief reason why the Church collectively is failing so lamentably to "turn to flight the armies of the aliens" is because there is so much jealousy and strife among its own members!

Hebrews 11:35, 36

Chapter 80 - The Pinnacle of Faith

In His lengthy but most blessed description of the Life of Faith the Spirit of God has, in Hebrews 11, passed from one phase of it to another, exhibiting to our view its many-sidedness. But there was one other aspect thereof which required to be delineated in order to give completeness to the whole, and that we have designated the "pinnacle" of faith, for to suffer for God, to meekly endure whatever affliction He is pleased to put upon us, to lay down our lives for the sake of His Truth if called upon to do so, is the highest point which faith can reach. Therefore, in the text which is now to engage our attention, He moved the apostle to pass on to an entirely different sort of the fruits of faith from those mentioned in the preceding verses, and shows us the power of faith to support the soul under sufferings, even the acutest afflictions to which the human mind and body can be subjected.

"For hearing of these great and glorious things, they might be apt to think that they were not so immediately concerned in them. For their condition was poor, persecuted, exposed to all evils, and death itself, for the profession of the Gospel. Their interest, therefore, was to inquire, what help in, what relief from faith they might expect in that condition? What will faith do where men are to be oppressed, persecuted and slain? Wherefore, the apostle, applying himself directly unto their condition, with what they suffered, and further feared on the account of their profession of the Gospel; he produceth a multitude of examples, as so many testimonies unto the power of faith in safe-guarding and preserving the souls of believers under the greatest sufferings that human nature can be exposed unto" (John Owen).

Not only were these instances of the sufferings of the O. T. saints pertinent to the circumstances the Hebrew Christians of Paul's time were in, but we too need to be informed of what faith in God and fidelity to His Truth, may entail. At the outset of the Christian life, we are bidden to first sit down and "count the cost" (Luke

14:28), which means that we are required to contemplate those sufferings which the following of Christ is likely to involve, and it is well that we should frequently remind ourselves that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It is criminal silence on the part of any servant of God to conceal from his hearers that a true profession of the name of Christ will necessarily bring down upon us not only the scorn and opposition of the outside world, but also the hatred and persecution of the false religious world. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12).

The Lord Jesus Christ dealt openly in this matter, and plainly made known what was likely to befall those whom He called to follow Him, and expressly affirmed that He would admit none into the ranks of His disciples save those who denied themselves, took up their cross, and engaged to undergo all sorts of sufferings for His sake and the Gospel's. He deceived none with fair promises of a smooth and easy passage through this world. So too does His faithful apostle, in the verses which are to be before us, after setting before the Hebrews some of the grand and glorious achievements which the faith of their predecessors had wrought, now remind them of others who were called upon to exercise their faith in the greatest miseries that could be undergone. Great trials and sore afflictions are to be expected in the path of faith. The Savior Himself encountered them, and sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master.

"All the evils here enumerated, did befall the persons intended, on the account of their faith, and the profession thereof. The apostle does not present unto the Hebrews a company of miserable, distressed creatures, that fell into that state through their own default, or merely on the account of a common providence, disposing their lot in this world into such a state of misery, as it is with many; but all the things mentioned, they underwent merely and solely on the account of their faith in God, and the profession of true religion. So as that their case differed in nothing from that which they might be called unto" (John Owen).

But not only were these sufferings encountered in the path of fidelity to God, but it was the exercise of faith which enabled those O.T. worthies to patiently and spiritually endure them. Faith is a grace which draws down from Heaven whatever blessing of God is

most needful to the saint, and therefore does it stand him in as good stead in the night of adversity as in the day of prosperity. Faith is a new-creation principle in the soul, which not only energizes its possessor to perform exploits, but it also enables him to hold his head above the dark waters when floods threaten to drown him. Faith suffices the Christian to face danger calmly, to continue steadfast in duty when menaced by the most foreboding outlook, to stand his ground when threatened with sorest sufferings. Faith imparts a steadfastness of purpose, a noble courage, a tranquility of mind, which no human education or fleshly efforts can supply. Faith makes the righteous as bold as a lion, refusing to recant though horrible tortures and a martyr's death be the only alternative.

Faith gives its possessor patience under adversities, for by faith he sees them in a scriptural light and bears them by the enabling strength of Christ. How good and profitable is a sanctified affliction, but then only is it sanctified to us when faith is "mixed with" it. When faith is not in exercise, the heart is occupied with the things which are seen and temporal: only the creature's hand or the creature's treachery is viewed, and peevishness and resentment prevail; or worse still, we are tempted to entertain hard thoughts against God, and to say "the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." But when the Spirit renews us in the inner man, and faith becomes active again, how differently do things then appear! Then we take ourselves to task and say, "Why art thou cast down O my soul, hope thou in God."

It belongs entirely unto the sovereign pleasure of God to order and dispose the outward conditions through which His Church passes upon earth; seasons of prosperity and times of adversity are regulated by Him as He deems best. Eras of peace and security and eras of persecution and peril are interchangeable, like day and night, summer and winter. Yet God does not act arbitrarily. It was not until after Abraham left Bethel and its altar, and journeyed southward (Egypt-wards) that there arose a famine in the land (Gen. 12:8-10). It was only when Israel "forsook the Lord God of their father... and followed other gods," that His anger was kindled against them, and "He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about" (Judg. 2:11-14). It was only when men "slept" that He suffered the Enemy to sow "tares" among the wheat (Matthew 13:25). It was after

Ephesus left her "first love" that the Smyranean era of persecution was experienced (Rev. 2:4 and 9, 10). And it is because so many of the professing servants of God repudiated His law during the previous generation, that we are now plagued with a reign of lawlessness in the church, home, and state.

God will not be mocked, and in His righteous government He visits the iniquities of the fathers upon their children, and hence it is that seasons of prosperity are followed by seasons of adversity. Yet during these seasons of adversity, whether they take the form of spiritual dearth or of physical peril, the godly remnant who sigh and cry because of the abominations which are found in what are termed the public "places of worship," or who meekly endure the persecutions of hypocritical professors or of the openly ungodly world, are no less acceptable with God, and are as precious in His sight as those whose lot was previously cast in times of the greatest earthly felicity.

The darker the night, the more evident the few stars twinkling between the clouds. The more awful be the state of professing Christendom as a whole, the more suitable is the background for the children of God to display their colors. The fiercer be the opposition made against a spiritual faith, the grander the opportunity for bringing forth its choicest fruit. There is no higher aspect of faith than that which brings the heart to patiently submit unto whatever God sends us, to meekly acquiesce unto His sovereign will, to say "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). Oftentimes the faith which suffers is greater than the faith that can boast an open triumph. "Love beareth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7), and faith when it reaches the pinnacle of attainment declares, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

"There is as much glory unto a spiritual eye, in the catalogue of the effects of faith that follow, as in that which went before. The church is no less beautiful and glorious when encompassed, and seemingly overwhelmed with all the evils and dreadful miseries here recounted, than when it is in the greatest peace and prosperity. To look, indeed, only on the outside of them, gives a terrible undesirable prospect. But to see faith and love to God, working effectually under them all, to see comforts retained, yea, consolations abounding, holiness prompted, God glorified, the world condemned, the souls of men profited, and at length triumphant over

all; this is beautiful and glorious . . .

"It may also be observed that the apostle takes most of these instances, if not all of them, from the time of the persecution of the church under Antiochus, the king of Syria, in the days of the Maccabees. And we may consider concerning this reason: 1. That it was after the closing of the canon of the Scripture, or putting of the last hand unto writings by Divine inspiration under the O. T. Wherefore, as the apostle represented these things from the notoriety of fact then fresh in memory, and it may be, some books then written of those things, like the books of the Maccabees, yet remaining: yet as they are delivered out unto the church by him, they proceeded from Divine inspiration. 2. That in those days wherein these things fell out, there was no extraordinary prophet in the church. Prophecy, as the Jews confess, ceased under the second temple. And this makes it evident that the rule of the Word, and the ordinary ministry of the church, is sufficient to maintain believers in their duty against all oppositions whatever. 3. That this last persecution of the church under the O.T. by Antiochus, was typical of the last persecution of the Christian church under antichrist; as is evident to all that compare Daniel 8:10-14, 23-25; 11:36-39 with that of the Revelation in sundry places. And indeed the martyrologies of those who have suffered under the Roman antichrist, are a better exposition of this context than any that can be given in words" (John Owen).

"Women received their dead raised to life again" (verse 35). Some have complained because this clause is not placed at the end of verse 34, urging that it belongs there much more appropriately than it does at the beginning of verse 35, being a fitting climax to the miraculous achievements of faith enumerated in verses 33, 34. While it be true that the particular item here before us belongs to the same class of miracles found in the preceding verse, yet personally we regard it as suitable for placing at the head of what follows in verses 35-38, for it forms a suitable transition from the one to the other. And in this respect: those women passed through the sufferings of a sore bereavement before they had their beloved children restored to them—a reward for their kindness unto God's servants.

"Women received their dead raised to life again." The historical reference is to what is recorded in 1 Kings 17:22-24 and 2 Kings 4:35-37. How those remarkable cases show us once more that

there is nothing too hard or difficult for faith to effect when it works according to the revealed will of God! But what is the spiritual application of this unto us today? Is it not faith's seeking the Spirit's renewal of languishing graces? the practical heeding of that word "Strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die" (Rev. 3:2)! Or, to take a more extreme case, is it not a word of hope to the backslidden Christian, who has to all appearances lapsed back into a state of unregeneracy? Is it not faith's response to that word (addressed to Christians) "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. 5:14)!

"And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance" (verse 35). It is very touching to remember that the hand which first penned those words had taken a prominent part in inflicting torture upon the saints of God (Acts 8:3, 9:1), but, by grace, he was now a sharer of them (2 Cor. 11:24-27). The word "torture" here signifies "were racked": those O.T. saints were fastened to a device and then a wrench was turned which caused their joints to be pulled out of their sockets—a method of torture frequently resorted to by fiendish Romanists when seeking to force Protestants to recant. By this fearful form of suffering the graces of God's people were tested and tried.

"Not accepting deliverance." It was offered to them, but at the price of apostasy. Two alternatives were set before them: disloyalty to the Lord, or enduring the most excruciating suffering; surrender of the Truth, or being tortured by devils in human form. Freedom from this torture was offered to them in return for forsaking their profession. This is expressly affirmed of Eliezer and his seven brethren in 2 Maccabees. Yea, they were not only offered freedom from tortures and death, but promised great rewards and promotions, which they steadfastly refused. The principal design of Satan in setting torture before God's saints is not to slay their bodies, but is to destroy their souls. Space has always been given to the victim for consideration and recantation: entreaties have been mingled with threats to induce a renouncing of their profession.

Thus, the real test presented was, which did these saints of God esteem more highly: the present comfort of their bodies or the eternal interests of their souls? Let it be remembered that they were men and women of like passion with us: their bodies were made of the same tender and sensitive flesh as ours are, but such was the care

they had for their souls, so genuine was their faith and hope in a better resurrection, that they listened not to the appeals and whinings of the outward man. The same issue is drawn, though in another form, today: alas, what countless millions of people lose their souls eternally for the temporary gratification of their vile bodies. Reader, which do you esteem the more highly: your body or your soul? Your actions supply the answer: which receives the more thought, care and attention; which is "denied," and which is catered unto?

"Not accepting deliverance." The word for "deliverance" here is commonly translated "redemption" in the N. T.: its usage in this verse helps to a clearer understanding of that important term, and emphasizes the difference between it and "ransom." "Ransom" is the paying of the price which justice requires, but "redemption" is the actual emancipation of the one for whom the price was paid. These saints refused to accept a temporal "redemption" or "deliverance," because to have done so on the terms it was proffered to them would have meant the renunciation of their profession, apostasy from God. It was "through faith" they made this noble decision; it was love for the truth, which caused them to hold fast that which was infinitely dearer to them than an escape from bodily suffering. They had "bought the Truth," at the price of turning their backs on the world and their former religious friends, and bringing down upon themselves the scorn and hatred of them. And now they refused to "sell the Truth" (Prov. 23:23) out of a mere regard to bodily ease.

"Not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection": that last clause shows the ground of their steadfastness. The primary force of the expression here is a figurative one, as the verse as a whole clearly shows: they were offered a "resurrection" on the condition of their recantation, namely a "resurrection" from reproach to honor, from poverty to riches, from pain to ease and pleasure—it was a "resurrection" from the physical torture which threatened them: compare Hebrews 11:19. But their hearts were occupied with something far, far better than being raised up to earthly comforts and honors; their faith anticipated that morning without clouds, when their bodies would be raised in glory, made like Christ's, and taken to be with Him forever. It was the hope of that which supported their souls in the face of extreme peril and sustained them under acutest sufferings.

"That they might obtain a better resurrection." In passing, let it be noted that God had set before the Old Testament saints the hope of resurrection—they were not nearly so ignorant as the dispensationalists make them out to be, in fact were far wiser than most of our moderns. Resurrection has always been the top-stone in the building of faith (Job 19:25, 26), that which promised eternal reward, and that which gave life unto their obedience. A further proof of this fact is found in Acts 24:14-16: the faith of the "fathers" embraced "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." That glorious resurrection will more than compensate for any bodily denials or bodily sufferings which the Christian makes or experiences for Christ's sake.

"And others had trial of mockings, and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments" (verse 36). This verse supplies further details of what some of the O.T. saints were called upon to suffer for their fidelity to the Truth, sufferings which have been frequently duplicated during this Christian era. We are here informed of the various methods which the enemies of God employed in the afflicting of His people; no stone was left unturned in their persevering and merciless efforts to produce a denial of the Faith. While these things are harrowing to our feelings, yet they also serve to make manifest the sufficiency of Divine grace to support its recipients under most painful trials, and should evoke thanksgiving and praise unto Him that is able to make the weak stand up under the fiercest assaults of the Enemy.

"And others had trial of mockings." Let us, when we are reproached for Christ's sake and ridiculed because of our adherence to God's truth, call to mind that this was the mildest form of suffering which many who went before us on the pilgrim path were called upon to endure! The sneers and unkind words of our foes are not worthy of a pang in comparison with the far sorer pains which other believers have had to bear. It has ever been the portion of God's servants and people to be derided, reproached, and insulted: see Galatians 4:29, 2 Chronicles 36:16, Jeremiah 20:7, Lamentations 3:14; and my reader, if we are not being "mocked"—sneered at, scoffed at—it is because we are too lax in our ways and too worldly in our walk. Human nature has not changed; Satan has not changed; the world has not changed; and the more Christlike is our life the more shall we drink—in our measure—of the cup He drank from.

"And scourgings." The reference is to the lashings of their backs with whips of wire, which were most painful to experience, for they lacerated the flesh, drew blood, and macerated the body. It was not only a painful form of suffering, but a most humiliating one as well, for "scourgings" were reserved for the basest and most degenerate of men. The Lord Jesus was subjected to this form of ignominy and suffering from His enemies (Matthew 27:26), and so also were His apostles (Acts 5:40, 16:23). It is true that we are now (for the immediate present) spared these corporeal "scourgings," but there is such a thing as being lashed by the tongue and harrowed in our minds; nevertheless, happy are we (Matthew 5:10-12) if we are so honored as to experience a little fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. But let us see well to it that we do not retaliate: ponder carefully and turn into earnest prayer Psalm 38:12-14; 1 Peter 2:21-23.

"Yea, moreover of bonds." The reference is to cords, chains, manacles and fetters, binding them fast, so that they could not run away. In this item we see how "the excellent" of the earth (Ps. 16:3) were basely dealt with as though they had been the vilest of malefactors. Does your heart go out in pity to them, dear reader? Ah, what if you are "bound" even now with something far, far worse than outer and material ropes and chains! Multitudes are held fast by habits they cannot break; their souls are fettered by iniquities from which they cannot free themselves. Sin has taken them captive, and has full dominion over them. Has it over you? Or, has Christ set you free—not from the hateful presence of indwelling sin, but from its reigning power. Daily ought we to pray and strive against everything which limits us spiritually.

"And imprisonments," which was the lot commonly apportioned to robbers and murderers. Here again we see the saints of God treated as the off-scouring of the earth, and let it be remembered that the prisons of those days were of a far different order from the comfortable buildings in which criminals are now incarcerated. One has only to read the experience of Jeremiah 38:11-13 to get some idea of the meaning of this word in our text: God's children were thrown into dark and damp dungeons, far below the level of the earth, unheated, unpaved, un-illuminated. One cannot read this clause in our text without thinking of dear Bunyan. Ah, my reader, nothing but a real faith in the living God could have enabled

those believers to have remained faithful unto death. The whole of the verses which have been before us, exhibit the efficacy and sufficiency of a spiritual faith to endure the worst that men and devils could inflict upon its favored possessors. Is yours only an easy-chair "faith"?

Hebrews 11:37, 38

Chapter 81 - The Pinnacle of Faith

There has been no greater instance of the degeneracy of human nature and its likeness to the Devil than in the fearful fact that so many who have occupied prominent positions—magistrates, ecclesiastical dignitaries, kings and emperors—were not content to take the bare lives of true worshippers of God by the sword, but invented the most fiendish methods of torture to destroy them. That educated men and women in high places, that those professing the name of Christ, should conduct themselves like savages, that their rage against the "excellent of the earth" should express itself in such villainy and inhumanity, is a most dreadful demonstration of human depravity when the hand of God is withdrawn. With what infinite patience does the Most High bear with the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction!

But why should God allow many of His dear children to encounter such terrible experiences? Among other answers, the following may be suggested. First, for the more thorough trial of His champions, that their faith, courage, patience, and other graces, might be more manifest. Second, to seal or ratify more plainly the Truth which they profess. Third, to encourage and strengthen the faith of their weaker brethren. Fourth, to give them more sensible evidence of what Christ endured for them. Fifth, to cause them to perceive the better the torments of Hell: if those whom God loves are permitted to endure such grievous and painful trials, what must we understand of those torments which the wrath of God inflicts upon those whom He hates!

The teaching of Scripture upon the various reasons why God calls upon His children to suffer at the hands of the openly wicked, or, as is more often the case, from those professing to be His people, is full of valuable instruction, and calls for prayerful pondering. One of the advantages gained from such an exercise is the plainer perception of the very real and radical difference there is between that spiritual and supernatural faith which is possessed by God's

elect, and that notional and natural faith which is all that millions of empty professors have. Should it please God to remove His restraining hand and permit open and fierce persecution to once more break forth upon the true followers of the Lamb, the difference just mentioned would be made apparent, for "When tribulation ariseth because of the Word," the stony-ground hearer is soon "offended" (Matthew 13:21), or, as Luke 8:13 expresses it "fall away." But different far is it with the good-ground hearer.

"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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7). That faith which is "the gift of God" endures to the end. The testing of that faith, the fiery trial thereof serves the better to make manifest the Divine origin of it: only that faith which has come from God is able to endure the testing of God. Just as it is in the furnace that genuine gold is most quickly distinguished from tinsel, so it is under sore trials that the difference between spiritual and natural faith becomes the more apparent. Like much of the imitation jewelry of the day, the creatures-faith of empty professors, may look more glittering, be more bulky, and have more attraction for the outward eye, and be better calculated to adorn its possessor, than does the genuine faith of God's elect, which is often small in size, dull in appearance and lacking in attractiveness to the human beholder.

Yes, dear reader, it is the fiery trial which puts to the proof the kind of faith we really possess. Let the two faiths—that natural faith which man originates, and exercises by an act of his own will, and that spiritual faith which is the gift of God and which man can no more exercise of himself than he can create a world—be placed side by side in the crucible; let the burning flame try which is the genuine metal; let the hot fire play around them both, and the false faith (like imitation gold) will soon melt away into a shapeless mass of base metal; but the true faith will come forth uninjured by the fire, having lost nothing but what it could well spare—the dross with which it has been mixed. See that fact strikingly and solemnly adumbrated in Daniel 3: the furnace of Babylon harmed not the three Hebrews who were cast into it—it merely destroyed their bonds; but it consumed the Babylonians (verses 22)!

Let it be duly noted that in 1 Peter 1:7 the apostle, when comparing faith with gold, accredits to the former a higher value: it

is "much more precious than of gold that perisheth." Gold, though its genuineness may be proved by enduring the test of fire, is yet a perishing thing—a thing of the earth, a thing of time. That gold for which men toil so laboriously and sell their souls to acquire, is of no avail on a deathbed, still less will it stand any in good stead in the Day of Judgment! At death it has to be left behind, for none can take it with him into the next life. Then how much more precious is that faith which, instead of, like gold, leaving its possessor under the wrath of God, will be "found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ!"

But the point to which we would now direct special attention is that it is not so much the faith itself as "the trial of faith" which is more precious than of gold which perisheth. This is clear to the spiritual mind: trials and temptations are the means which God employs to make manifest to the soul the reality and strength of that faith which He bestows, for there is in every trial and temptation an opposition made to the faith which is in the heart, and trial and temptation, so to speak, threatens the life of faith. How so? Because under the trial, God, for the most part, hides Himself: the light of His countenance is no longer visible, His smile is overcast by a dark providence. Nevertheless, He puts forth a secret power which upholds the soul, otherwise it would sink into utter despair, be swallowed up by the power of unbelief. Here, then, is the conflict: the trial fighting against faith, and that faith against the trial.

Now then in this trial, under this sharp conflict, in this hot furnace, the spiritual and supernatural faith is not burned or destroyed, but instead, grips firmly the promise, and the faithfulness of Him who has given it. And thus trial of faith becomes exceedingly precious. It is "precious" to its possessor when its genuineness is made the more manifest to him. It is "precious" in the sight of God's people, who discern it, and derive strength and comfort from what they witness in the experience of a fellow-saint who is thus tried and blessed. It is "precious" in the sight of God Himself, who crowns it with His own manifest approbation and puts upon it the seal of His approving smile. But above all things it will be found "precious" at the final appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory, for then He "will be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:10).

To suffer the hardest things as well as to do the greatest, is all

one to faith. It is equally ready for both when God shall require; and it is equally effectual in both, as God shall strengthen. The performing of spectacular exploits and the enduring of terrible affliction, differ almost as much to the flesh as do Heaven and Hell, but they are one to faith when duty calls. This is very evident from the section of Hebrews 11 which is now before us (verses 33-38), the closing portion of which is about to engage our attention. At the beginning of this section we are furnished with a list of the marvels which were wrought by a God-given faith: at the close thereof we are given a list of fearful sufferings and privations which were patiently and courageously borne by a God-sustained faith. The latter, as much as the former, demonstrates the supernatural character of that faith which is in view throughout our chapter; yea, forms a most glorious climax thereto.

We say that the fearful sufferings experienced by God's people form a blessed climax in the Spirit's unfolding of the Life of Faith: those sufferings mark, in fact, the pinnacle of its attainments. Why so? Because they make manifest a heart that is completely subject to God, that bows submissively to whatever He is pleased to send, which has been so completely won to Him that torture and death are deliberately chosen and gladly preferred to apostasy from Him. A "Meek and quiet spirit" is of "great price" in the sight of God (1 Pet. 3:4), and nothing more plainly evidences the meekness of the Christian—his lying passive as clay in the hands of the Potter—as faith's willing acceptance of whatever lot our Father sees fit to appoint us. To be faithful unto death, to have unshakable confidence in the Lord, though He suffers us to be slain, to trust Him when to sight and sense it seems He has deserted us, is the highest exercise of all of faith.

Ere closing these introductory paragraphs, let us seek to point out the various actings of faith in times of danger, trial, and persecution.

First, faith recognizes that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6), that He is on the throne of the universe, and "doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand" (Dan. 4:35). Yes, dear reader, a spiritual faith perceives that things do not happen by chance, but that everything is regulated by the Lord God. Second, faith recognizes that everything which enters our lives is ordered by

Him who is our Father, and that our enemies can do nothing whatever against us without His direct permission—the Devil could not touch Job nor sift Peter until he first obtained leave from the Lord! Oh what a sure resting-place is there here for the troubled and trembling heart. Third, faith recognizes that, no matter how fiercely Satan may be permitted to rage against us, or how sorely men persecute, their malicious efforts will be made to work together for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Fourth, by mixing itself with God's promises, faith obtains present help, strength and consolation from God. It derives peace and comfort from that sure word, "When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa. 43:2). It counts upon the assurance "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Finally, faith looks away from the present conflict, and views the promised rest. It anticipates the future reward, and as it does so, is assured that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Such are some of the workings of faith when God's children are called upon to pass through the furnace.

"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (verses 37, 38). These verses continue the list of sufferings begun in verse 35. They enumerate the various kinds of persecution to which many of the O. T. saints were subjected. They are of two types: first, such as fell under the utmost rage of their enemies, enduring a martyr's death; second, such as to escape death, exposed themselves to great miseries which were undergone in this life.

It may be helpful at this point for us to raise the question, How are such dreadful sufferings to be harmonized with the Divine promises of temporal blessings on those whose ways please the Lord? Dispensationalists are very fond of emphasizing the temporal character of the O.T. promises, imagining that the promises of the

N.T. are of a greatly superior character. In this they err seriously. On the one hand, the verses which are now under consideration describe the temporal experiences of some of the most eminent of the O.T. saints; on the other hand, the New T. expressly affirms godliness has "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). The answer to our opening query is very simple: such promises as those in Deuteronomy 28:1-6 (which still hold good to faith!) are to be understood with two exceptions: unless our sins call down Divine chastisements, or unless God is pleased to make trial of our graces by afflictions.

"They were stoned." This form of death was appointed by God Himself to be inflicted upon notorious malefactors: Leviticus 20:2, Joshua 7:24, 25. But our text has reference to the Satanic perversion of this Divine institution, for here it is the enemies of God inflicting this punishment upon His beloved and faithful people. "The devil is never more a devil nor more outrageous, than when he gets a pretense of God's weapons into his own hands" (Owen). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, suffered death in this form. It is touching to remember that the one who first penned our text, himself "consented" to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1): later he himself was stoned at Lystra.

"They were sawn asunder." This was a barbarous method of execution which the later Jews seemed to have learned from the heathen. There is no record in Scripture of anyone being put to death in this way, though tradition says Isaiah ended his earthly career in this manner. That some of the heroes of faith perished in this way is clear from our text, evidencing the malice of the Devil and the brutal rage of persecution. Their endurance of such torture demonstrates the reality and power of the Spirit's support, enabling them to remain true to God, and in the midst of their agonies sweetly commit their spirits into His hands, to the astonishment of their murderers. How this should stir us up to bear patiently the far smaller trials we may be called upon to encounter.

"Were tempted." This may be considered two ways, as pointing to an aggravation of their sufferings, or as referring to a separate trial of faith; we will take it in both respects. First, as signifying an intensification of their other trials, the reference would be to their persecutors setting before them the promise of relief upon their repudiation of the Truth—liberty at the price of perfidy. The

baits of immunity and advancement were offered to them on the condition that they would abandon their strictness and join the ranks of the loose livers of that day. We believe that our text also includes the temptings of Satan, seeking to fill their minds with doubts as to God's goodness and power, urging them to recede from the stand they have taken. Because they remained resolute, refusing to yield to the insidious demands of their persecutors, they were cruelly butchered.

"Were tempted" may in the second place, be contemplated as referring to that life of ease and pleasure which worldly advancement and riches might provide. History solemnly records that numbers of those who courageously endured long and cruel imprisonment (and other sore trials) for the Truth's sake during the reign of the papist and bloody queen Mary of England, yet upon the accession of Queen Elizabeth were freed, elevated to high places, and obtaining much wealth and power, denied the power of godliness and made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. But those in our text were possessed of a faith like unto that of Moses (Heb. 11:24-26), and therefore were enabled to withstand the powerful temptations of the world. Poverty, dear reader, is often sent by God upon His people as a merciful means of delivering them from the dangerous snares which wealth entails.

"Were slain with the sword": there is probably a double reference here. First, to the sword of violence, when persecutors in their fury fell upon the servants and people of God, butchering them for their fidelity: see 1 Samuel 22:18, 21, 1 Kings 19:10. Second, the sword of justice, or rather injustice, the law being enforced against the saints. Probably this form of death is mentioned last to signify the multitude of martyrs who by their blood sealed up the Truth: literally rendered our text reads, "they died in the slaughter of the sword," which denotes the insatiable thirst of the persecutors and the large number which they felled. Papists have exceeded pagans herein: witness their cruel massacres in France and other places: well may the Holy Spirit represent the whore Babylon as being "drunk with the blood of the saints" (Rev. 17:6).

"They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins," which means they were hounded out of their homes, and forced to go forth and exist as they might, without any settled habitation. "They were driven out to share the lot of wild animals, and were reduced to wear

their skins, instead of clothes woven by man. This form of suffering is mentioned here, to show, on the one hand, the cruelty of religious persecution; and, on the other hand, the mighty sustaining power of faith. What power indeed is this! It was not merely the compulsion such as that which enforced the wandering of society's outlaws. It was rather the deliberate choice like that of Moses (verses 24-26). Any day, any one of these wanderers could have rejoined their fellowmen, enjoyed their society, and shared their comforts; but they preferred this lot to apostasy" (E.W.B.)

"Being destitute, afflicted, tormented." These terms set forth the variety and intensity of the sufferings experienced by the homeless saints. "Destitute" means they were deprived of the ordinary necessities of life, and further signifies they were denied the kind assistance of relatives and friends: they were driven forth without the means of subsistence and were beyond the reach of succor from all who cared for them. "Afflicted" probably has reference to their state of mind: they were not emotionless stoics, but felt acutely their sad condition. No doubt the Enemy took full advantage of their state and injected many unbelieving and harassing thoughts into their minds. "Tormented" is rather too strong a word here: we understand the reference to be unto the ill-treatment they met with from the unfriendly strangers encountered in their wanderings, who regarded them without any pity and evilly treated them.

"Of whom the world was not worthy." This parenthetical clause is brought in here for the purpose of removing an objection: many might suppose that these despised wanderers were only receiving their just due, as not being fit to live in decent society. To remove this scandal the apostle put the blame where it rightly belonged, affirming that it was society which was unworthy of having the saints of God in their midst. In its wider aspect, the "world" here takes in the whole company of the ungodly; but in its narrower sense (that of the context), it has reference to the apostate "world"—all history, sacred and secular—is harmonious on this point: the most merciless, conscienceless, cruel, and inveterate persecutors of God's elect have been religious people!

"Of whom the world was not worthy." Here we see the difference between God's estimate and that of unregenerate religionists concerning the Children of Faith. God regards them as

"the excellent" of the earth in whom is His "delight" (Ps. 16:3). "A true believer by reason of his union with Christ, and of the abode of the Spirit of sanctification in him, is worth more than a million of worlds; as a rich and precious jewel is more worth than many loads of filthy mud" (W. Gouge). The excellency of saints appears also in the benefit and blessings which they bring to the places where they reside: they are the "salt of the earth," though the corrupt multitude around them realizes it not. Their presence stays the hand of Divine judgment (Gen. 19:22), brings down blessing (Gen. 30:27), and their prayers secure Divine healing (Gen. 20:17). How little does the world realize how much it owes to those whom they hate so bitterly!

"They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." Not only were they without a settled habitation, but they were compelled to resort to desolate places and the dens of wild beasts, in order to escape the fury of their foes. The word for "wandering" here is different from the one used in the previous verse: there it signifies to go up and down from house to house, or town to town, in hope of finding succor; but in which they were disappointed. Here the term denotes a wandering in unknown territory, going (like a blind man) they knew not whither: it is the term used of Abraham in verse 8, and of Hagar in Genesis 21:14, and of wandering sheep in Matthew 18:12. What a commentary upon fallen human nature: these saints of God were safer among the beasts of the field than in the religious world inflamed by the Devil! While these lines are being read, there are probably some of God's children in foreign lands suffering these very experiences.

Seeing that faith in the living God will alone support the soul under manifold trials, how necessary it is that we labor in the fear of the Lord to get our hearts rooted and grounded in the Truth, so that when afflictions or persecutions come we may be enabled to show forth the power and fruits of this spiritual grace. Faith has to overcome the fear of man as well as the love of the world! Whatever sufferings God may appoint in the path of duty, they are to be patiently borne as seeing Him who is invisible. Their enemies clothed in death in the most hideous and horrible forms that hatred could devise, yet the faith of those saints boldly met and endured it. How thankful we should be that God's restraining hand is still upon the reprobate, for human nature has not improved any.

Hebrews 11:39, 40

Chapter 82 - The Family of Faith

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect"

(verses 39, 40). Several details in these verses call for careful consideration. First, to what does "the promise" here refer to? Second, in what sense had the O.T. saints "not received" the promise? Third, what is the "better thing" which God provided for us? Fourth, what is here meant by "be made perfect"? Widely different answers have been returned to these questions, and even the most reliable of the commentators are by no means agreed; therefore it would ill-become us to speak dogmatically, where men of God differ. Instead of wearying the reader with their diversive views, we will expound our text according to what measure of light God has granted us upon it.

As we approach our task there are several considerations which need to be borne in mind, the observing of which should aid us not a little. First, ascertaining the relation of our text to that which precedes. Second, discovering the exact relation of its several clauses. Third, studying it in the light of the distinctive and dominant theme of the particular epistle in which it occurs. Fourth, weighing its leading terms in connection with their usage in parallel passages. If these four things be duly attended to we ought not to go far wrong in our interpretation. Our purpose in enumerating them is principally to indicate to your preachers the methods which should be followed in the critical examination of any difficult passage.

As to the connection between our present verses and those which precede, there is no difficulty. The apostle, having so forcibly and largely, set out the virtue and vigor of faith, by the admirable workings and fruits thereof, both in doing and in suffering, now gives a general summary: they all "obtained a good report." The relations of the several clauses of our text to each other, may be set out thus: "and these all" refer to the entire company which has been

before us in the previous verses; a "good report" is ascribed to them; yet they had not "received the promise"; because God had provided something "better" for the N.T. saints. The dominant theme of Hebrews is, The immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The leading terms in our text will be pondered in what follows.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith." Two things are here in view: the persons spoken of, and that which is predicated of them. The reference is to all spoken of in the previous parts of the chapter, and by necessary inference, to all believers before the incarnation of Christ who exhibited a true faith. The words "these all" is restrictive, excluding others who had not the faith here mentioned. "Many more than these lived before Christ was exhibited, yea, lived in the time and place that some of these did, yet received no good report. Cain lived and offered a sacrifice with Abel, yet was none of these. Ham was in the ark with Shem; Ishmael in Abraham's family with Isaac; Esau in the same womb with Jacob; Dathan and Abiram came through the Red Sea with Caleb and Joshua: many other wicked unbelievers were mixed with believers, yet they obtained not any such good report. Though their outward condition was alike, yet their inward disposition was much different" (W. Gouge).

Thus it is today. There are two widely different classes of people who come under the sound of the Word: those who believe it, and those who believe it not. And those of the former class have also to be divided, for while there are a few in whom that Word works effectually in a spiritual way, many have nothing more than a natural faith in its letter. This latter faith—which so many today mistake for a saving one—is merely an intellectual assent to the Divine authority of the Bible and to the verities of its contents—like that possessed by most of the Jews of Christ's day, and which though good so far as it goes, changes not the heart nor issues in a godly life. A supernatural faith, which is wrought in the soul by the operations of the Holy Spirit, issues in supernatural works, such as those attributed unto the men and women mentioned in our chapter. It is a Divine principle which enables its possessor to overcome the world, patiently endure the sorest afflictions, and love God and His truth more than life itself.

"Having obtained a good report through faith." Because of

their trusting in Christ alone for salvation, and because of their walking in subjection to His revealed will, they received approbation. There is probably a threefold reference in the words now before us. First, unto God's own testimony which He bore to them: this is found in His Word, where their names receive honorable mention, and where the fruits of their faith are imperishably preserved. Second, to the Spirit's bearing witness with their spirit that they were the children of God (Rom. 8:16), the rejoicing which they had from the testimony of a good conscience (2 Cor. 1:12): this in blessed contrast from the world's estimate of them, who regarded and treated them as the off-scouring of all things. Third, to the esteem in which they were held by the Church, their fellow-saints testifying to the un-worldliness of their lives: this shows our faith should be evidenced by such good works that it is justified before men.

"Received not the promise." The singular number here implies some pre-eminent excellent thing promised, and this is Jesus Christ, the Divine Savior. He is said to be given according to "the promise" (Acts 13:23). God's "promise" was declared to be fulfilled when He brought Christ forth (Acts 13:32, 33). In Acts 2:39 and 26:6 Christ is set forth under this term "promise." Christ Himself is the prime promise, not only because He was the substance of the first promise given after the fall (Gen. 3:15), but also because He is the complement or accomplishment of all the promises (2 Cor. 1:20). The great promise of God to send His Son, born of a woman, to save His people from their sins, was the Object of Faith of the Church throughout all the generations of the O.T. era. Therein we may discern the rich grace of God in providing for the spiritual needs of His saints from earliest times.

"Received not the promise." As several times before in this epistle, "promise" is here used metonymically for the thing promised, and this it is which explains the "received not." As Owen expressed it, "The promise as a faithful engagement pledge of future good, they received, but the good thing itself was not in their days exhibited." They did not live to see historically accomplished that which their faith specifically embraced. As the Lord Jesus declared to His disciples, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matthew

13:17). Herein we behold the strength and perseverance of faith, that they continued to look, unwaveringly, for so many centuries for Him that should come, and came not in their lifetime.

"God having provided some better thing for us." The verb here looks back to the eternal counsels of Divine grace, to the Everlasting Covenant; it is a word which denotes God's determination, designation and appointment of Christ to be the propitiatory sacrifice, and the exact season for His advent. "When the fullness of time was come (the season ordained by Heaven), God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4:4). Thus it should be clear that the contrast which is pointed in the sentence before us, is that between "the promise" given and "the promise" performed. It is at that point, and no other, we find the essential difference between the faith of the O.T. saints and the faith of the N.T. saints: the one looked forward to a Savior that was to come, the other looks back to a Savior who has come.

It seems strange that what is really so obvious and simple should have been regarded by many as obscure and difficult. In His "Great Cloud of Witnesses" E. W. Bullinger began comments on this passage by saying, "These verses must be among those to which Peter referred when he said, speaking of Paul's epistles, there are 'some things hard to be understood.' For they confessedly present no small difficulty." But what is there here which is "hard to be understood"? The very epistle in which this verse occurs supplies a sure key to its correct interpretation. As we have said above, the great theme of it is, The immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism, and those of our readers who have followed us through this series of expositions, will recall how many illustrations of this have been before us. Another one is present in 11:39, 40: "they received not the (fulfillment of) the promise," we have—"God having provided some better thing for us": cf. Hebrews 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34 for the word "better."

It is really pathetic and deplorable to see what most of the moderns make of our present verse. In their anxiety to magnify the contrast between the Mosaic and Christian economies, and in their ignorance of much of the contents of the O.T. scriptures, they have seized upon these words "God having provided some better thing for us" to bolster up one of their chief errors, and have read into them that which any one having even a superficial acquaintance with the

Psalms and Prophets should have no difficulty in perceiving to be utterly untenable. Some have said that the "better thing" which we Christians have is eternal life, others that it is regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit, others that it is membership in the Body of Christ with the heavenly calling that entails—denying that these blessings were enjoyed by any of the O.T. saints. Such is a fair sample of the rubbish which is now to be found in most of the "ministry," oral and written, of this degenerate age.

In their crude and arbitrary attempts to rightly divide the word of truth, those calling themselves "dispensationalists" have wrongly divided the family of God. The entire Election of Grace have God for their Father, Christ for their Savior, the Holy Spirit for their Comforter. All who are saved, from the beginning to the end of earth's history, are the objects of God's everlasting love, share alike in the benefits of Christ's atonement, and are begotten by the Spirit unto the same inheritance. God communicated to Abel the same kind of faith as He does to His children today. Abraham was justified in precisely the same manner as Christians are now (Rom. 4:2). Moses bore the "reproach of Christ," and had respect unto the identical "recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26) as is set before us. David was as truly a stranger and pilgrim on earth as we are (Ps. 119:19), and looked unto the same eternal pleasures at God's right hand as we do (Ps. 16:11; 23:6).

The worst mistakes made by the "dispensationalists" grow out of their failures at the following points: first, to see the organic union between the Mosaic and Christian economies; second, to perceive that the "old covenant" and the "new covenant" were but two different administrations under which the blessings of the "everlasting covenant" are imparted; third, to distinguish between the spiritual remnant and the nation itself. The relation between the patriarchal and the Mosaic dispensations and this Christian era may be stated thus: they stood to each other, partly as the beginning does to the end, and partly as the shell does to the kernel. The former were preparatory, the latter is the full development—first the blade (in the patriarchal dispensation), then the ear (the Mosaic), and now the full corn in the ear, in this Christian era. In the former we have the type and shadow; in the latter, the antitype and substance. Christianity is but the full development of what existed in former ages, or a grander exemplification of the truths and principles which

were then revealed.

The great fact that the Everlasting Covenant which God made with Christ as the Head of His Church formed the basis of all His dealings with His people, and that the terms and blessings of that Eternal Chapter were being administered by Him under the "old" and "new" covenants, may be illustrated from secular history. In practically every country there are two chief political parties. The policy, and particularly the methods followed, by these rival factions, differ radically, yet though the one may succeed the other in power, and though great changes mark their alternative regimes, and though many diverse laws may be enacted or cancelled from time to time, yet the fundamental constitution of the country remains unchanged. Thus it is under the Mosaic and Christian economies: widely different as they are in many incidental details, nevertheless God's moral government is always according to the same fundamental principles of grace and righteousness, mercy and justice, truth and faithfulness, in the one era equally as much as in the other.

The distinction between the regenerated remnant and the unregenerate nation during O.T. times, is as real and radical as that which now exists between real Christians and the multitude of empty professors with which Christendom abounds; yea, one is the type of the other. Just as empty professors now possess a "form of godliness" but are destitute of its "power," so the great bulk of the lineal descendants of Abraham were occupied only with the externals of Judaism—witness the scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day; and just as the lifeless religionists of our time are taken up with the "letter" of the Word and have no experimental acquaintance with its spiritual realities, so the un-quickened Israelites of old were engaged with the outward shell of their ritual, but never penetrated to its kernel. There was an election within an election, a remnant who were Jews "inwardly" (Rom. 2:29), among the great company surrounding them who were Jews only in name, outwardly.

The spiritual portion of that O. T. remnant of God's saints was identically the same as that of the Christian's now. They were the recipients of the free gift of grace in Christ (Gen. 6:8) as we are. They possessed eternal life (Ps. 133:3) as truly as we do. They rejoiced in the knowledge of sins forgiven (Ps. 32:1, 2) as heartily as we do. They were as really instructed by the Spirit (Nehemiah 9:20)

as we are. Nor were they left in total ignorance of the glorious future awaiting them: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country" (verses 13, 14). The word for "Country" there is not the ordinary one "chora," but "patris," which signifies Homeland, or Fatherland—such a "country" as one's father dwells in.

The question, then, returns upon us: Seeing the O.T. saints enjoyed all the essential spiritual blessings of which Christians now partake, exactly what is the "better thing" which God "provides for us"? The answer is a superior administration of the Everlasting Covenant: Hebrews 13:20. In what particular respects? Chiefly in these. First, we now have a better view of Christ than the O.T. saints had: they saw Him, chiefly through types and promises, whereas we view Him in the accomplishment and fulfillment of them. Second, there is now a broader foundation for faith to rest upon: they looked for a Christ who was to come and who would put away their sins; we look at a Christ who has come and who has put away our sins. Third, they were as minors, under teachers and governors; whereas we are in the position, dispensationally, of those who have attained their majority: Galatians 4:1-7. Fourth, there is now a wider outpouring of God's grace: it is no longer confined to an elect remnant in one nation, but reaches out to His favored people scattered among all nations.

"That they without us should not be made perfect." "The law (or Mosaic economy) made nothing perfect but the bringing in of a better hope did" (Heb. 7:19). The "perfecting" of a thing consists in the well-finishing of it, and a full accomplishment of all things appertaining thereto. There is no doubt that the ultimate reference of our text is to the eternal glory of the whole Family of Faith in heaven; yet we believe it also includes the various degrees by which that perfection is attained, and the means thereunto. They are, First, the taking away of sin—which makes man most imperfect—and the clothing him with the robe of righteousness, in which he may appear perfect before God. These were secured by the life and death of Jesus Christ. In that, the O.T. saints were not "made perfect without us," for their sins and our sins were expiated by the same Sacrifice,

and their persons and our persons are justified by the same Righteousness.

Second, the subduing of the power of indwelling sin, enabling those justified to walk in the paths of righteousness, which is through the enabling of the Spirit. In this too the O. T. saints were not (relatively) "made perfect without us," as is clear from Psalm 23:4; 51:11 etc. Third, the Spirit enabling those who are united to Christ to stand up against all assaults, and to persevere in a spiritual growth; in this also the O. T. saints were not "made perfect without us," as is evident by a comparison of Psalm 97:10 with 1 Peter 1:15. Fourth, the receiving of the soul to Glory when it leaves the body: this also was common to O.T. and N.T. saints alike—we are not unmindful of the carnal theory held by some who imagine that prior to the death of Christ, the souls of saints went only to some imaginary Paradise "in the heart of the earth"; but this is much too near akin to the subterranean limbus of Romanism to merit any refutation.

Fifth, the resurrection of the body. In this the whole Family of Faith shall share alike, and at the same time: "In Christ shall all be made alive; but every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:22, 23). And who are "Christ's"? why, all that the Father gave to Him, all that He purchased with His blood. God's Word knows nothing of His people being raised in sections, at intervals. Sixth, the re-union between the soul and body, which takes place at Christ's appearing. In Hebrews 12:23 the O. T. saints are referred to as "the spirits of just men made perfect, but they are still "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23). In this too all the redeemed shall share alike, being "caught up together to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17).

Seventh, the entrance into eternal glory, when O. T. and N. T. saints alike shall, all together, be "forever with the Lord." Then shall be completely realized that ancient oracle concerning Shiloh "unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10. Then shall be fulfilled that mystical word, "I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). As the Lord Jesus declared, "I lay down My life for the (O. T.) sheep; And other (N. T.) sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must

bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock (Greek and R. V.), one Shepherd" (John 10:15, 16). Then it shall be that Christ will "gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad" (John 11:52)—not only among all nations, but through all dispensations.

In all of these seven degrees mentioned above are the elect of God "made perfect"; in all of them shall the O. T. and N. T. saints share alike: all shall come "in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). God deferred the resurrection and final glorification of the O. T. saints until the saints of this N.T. era should be called out and gathered into the one Body: "God has so arranged matters, that the complete accomplishment of the promise, both to the Old and New Testament believers, shall take place together; 'they' shall be made perfect, but not without 'us'; we and they shall attain perfection together" (John Brown). Thus to "be made perfect" is here the equivalent of receiving (the full accomplishment of) the promise, or enjoying together the complete realization of the "better thing." Verses 39 and 40 are inseparably linked together, and the language used in the one serves to interpret that employed in the other, both being colored by the dominant theme of this epistle.

Thus our understanding of these two verses which have occasioned so much trouble to many of the commentators, is as follows. First, though the O. T. saints lived under an inferior administration of the Everlasting Covenant than we do, nevertheless, they "obtained a good report" and went to Heaven at death. Second, the "better thing" which God has provided for the N.T. saints is a superior administration of the Everlasting Covenant, that is, we enjoy superior means of grace to what they had. Spiritual and heavenly blessings were presented unto the Church in the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations under temporal and earthly images: Canaan being a figure of Heaven; Christ and His atonement being set forth under symbolic ceremonies and obscure ordinances. As the substance exceeds the shadows so is the state of the Church under the "new" covenant superior to its state under the "old." Third, God has ordered that the entire Family of Faith shall be "perfected" by the same Sacrifice, and shall together enjoy its purchased blessings throughout an endless eternity.

The practical application of the whole of the above unto our hearts, was well put by John Calvin: "If they on whom the light of grace had not as yet so brightly shone, displayed so great a constancy in and during evils, what ought the full brightness of the Gospel to produce in us! A small spark of light led them to heaven; when the sun of righteousness shines over us, with what pretense can we excuse ourselves if we still cleave to the earth?"

Hebrews 12:1

Chapter 83 - The Demands of Faith

Our present verse is a call to constancy in the Christian profession; it is an exhortation unto steadfastness in the Christian life; it is a pressing appeal for making personal holiness our supreme business and quest. In substance our text is parallel with such verses as Matthew 16:24, Romans 6:13, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:12-14, Titus 2:12, 1 Peter 2:9-12. This summarization of the Christian's twofold duty is given again and again in the Scriptures: the duty of mortification and of vivification, the putting off of the "old man" and the putting on of the "new man" (Eph. 4:22-24). Analyzing the particular terms of our text, we find there is, first, the duty enjoined: to "run the race that is set before us." Second, the obstacles to be overcome: "lay aside every weight" etc. Third, the essential grace which is requisite thereto: "patience." Fourth, the encouragement given: the "great cloud of witnesses."

The opening "Wherefore" in our text looks back to Hebrews 10:35, 36, where the apostle had urged, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." That exhortation had been followed by a lengthy proof of the efficacy of persevering faith to enable its possessors to do whatever God commands, however difficult; to endure whatever God appoints, however severe; to obtain what He promises, however seemingly unattainable. All of this had been copiously illustrated in chapter 11, by a review of the history of God's people in the past, who had exemplified so strikingly and so blessedly the nature, the trials, and the triumphs of a spiritual faith. Having affirmed the unity of the family of God, the oneness of the O. T. and N. T. saints, assuring the latter that God has provided some better thing for us, the apostle now repeats the exhortation unto steadfast perseverance in the path of faith and obedience.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us." Here the apostle applies the

various illustrations given in the preceding chapter, making use of them as a grand motive to perseverance in the Christian faith and state. "If all the saints of God lived, suffered, endured, and conquered by faith, shall not we also? If the saints who lived before the Incarnation, before the redemption was accomplished, before the High Priest entered the heavenly sanctuary, trusted in the midst of discouragements and trials, how much more ought we who know the name of Jesus, who have received the beginning, the installment of the great Messianic promise?" (Adolph Saphir). Herein we are shown that only then do we read the O. T. narratives unto profit when we draw from them incentives to practical godliness.

In Hebrews 11 we have had described at length many aspects and characteristics of the life of faith. There we saw that a life of faith is an intensely practical thing, consisting of very much more than day-dreaming, or being regaled with joyous emotions, or even resting in orthodox views of the truth. By faith Noah built an ark, Abraham separated from his idolatrous neighbors and gained a rich inheritance, Moses forsook Egypt and became leader of Israel's hosts. By faith the Red Sea was crossed, Jericho captured, Goliath slain, the mouths of lions were closed, the violence of fire was quenched. A spiritual faith, then, is not a passive thing, but an active, energetic, vigorous, and fruitful one. The same line of thought is continued in the passage which is now before us, the same branch of truth is there in view again, only under a figure—a figure very emphatic and graphic.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Here the Christian is likened unto an athlete, and his life unto the running of a race. This is one of a number of figures used in the N.T. to describe the Christian life. Believers are likened to shining lights, branches of the vine, soldiers, strangers and pilgrims: the last-mentioned more closely resembling the figure employed in our text, but with this difference: travelers may rest for awhile, and refresh themselves, but the racer must continue running or he ceases to be a "racer." The figure of the race occurs frequently, both in the O. T. and N. T.: Psalm 119:32, Song of Solomon 1:4, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7. Very solemn is that word in Galatians 5:7, "ye did run well": the Lord, in His mercy, grant that that may never be said of writer or reader.

The principal thoughts suggested by the figure of the "race"

are rigorous self-denial and discipline, vigorous exertion, persevering endurance. The Christian life is not a thing of passive luxuriation, but of active "fighting the good fight of faith!" The Christian is not called to lie down on flowery beds of ease, but to run a race, and athletics are strenuous, demanding self-sacrifice, hard training, the putting forth of every ounce of energy possessed. I am afraid that in this work-hating and pleasure-loving age, we do not keep this aspect of the truth sufficiently before us: we take things too placidly and lazily. The charge which God brought against Israel of old applies very largely to Christendom today: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1): to be "at ease" is the very opposite of "running the race."

The "race" is that life of faith and obedience, that pursuit of personal holiness, to which the Christian is called by God. Turning from sin and the world in penitence and trust to Christ is not the finishing-post, but only the starting-point. The Christian race begins at the new birth, and ends not till we are summoned to leave this world. The prize to be run for is heavenly glory. The ground to be covered is our journey through this life. The track itself is "set before us": marked out in the Word. The rules to be observed, the path which is to be traversed, the difficulties to be overcome, the dangers to be avoided, the source and secret of the needed strength, are all plainly revealed in the holy Scriptures. If we lose, the blame is entirely ours; if we succeed, the glory belongs to God alone.

The prime thought suggested in the figure of running the race set before us is not that of speed, but of self-discipline, whole-hearted endeavor, the calling into action of every spiritual faculty possessed by the new man. In his helpful commentary, J. Brown pointed out that a race is vigorous exercise. Christianity consists not in abstract speculations, enthusiastic feelings, or specious talk, but in directing all our energies into holy actions. It is a laborious exertion: the flesh, the world, the devil are like a fierce gale blowing against us, and only intense effort can overcome them. It is a regulated exertion: to run around in a circle is strenuous activity, but it will not bring us to the goal; we must follow strictly the prescribed course. It is progressive exertion: there is to be a growth in grace, an adding to faith of virtue, etc. (2 Pet. 1:5-7), a reaching forth unto those things which are before.

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us." We

only "run" when we are very anxious to get to a certain place, when there is some attraction stimulating us. That word "run" then presupposes the heart eagerly set upon the goal. That "goal" is complete deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, perfect conformity to the lovely image of Christ, entrance into the promised rest and bliss on High. It is only as that is kept steadily in view, only as faith and hope are in real and daily exercise, that we shall progress along the path of obedience. To look back will cause us to halt or stumble; to look down at the roughness and difficulties of the way will discourage and produce slackening, but to keep the prize in view will nerve to steady endeavor. It was thus our great Exemplar ran: "Who for the JOY that was set before Him" (verse 2).

But let us now consider, secondly, the means prescribed: "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." That might be tersely expressed in several different forms: let us relinquish those things which would impede our spiritual progress; let us endeavor with might and main to overcome every hindering obstacle; let us attend diligently unto the way or method which will enable us to make the best speed. While sitting at our ease we are hardly conscious of the weight of our clothes, the articles held in our hands, or the cumbersome objects we may have in our pockets. But let us be aroused by the howlings of fierce animals, let us be pursued by hungry wolves, and methinks that none of us would have much difficulty in understanding the meaning of those words "let us lay aside every weight!"

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." While no doubt each of these expressions has a definite and separate force, yet we are satisfied that a certain school of writers err in drawing too sharp and broad a line of distinction between them, for a careful examination of their contentions will show that the very things they consider to be merely "weights," are, in reality, sins. The fact is that in most quarters there has been, for many years past, a deplorable lowering of the standard of Divine holiness, and numerous infractions of God's righteous law have been wrongly termed "failures," "mistakes," and "minor blemishes," etc. Anything which minimizes the reality and enormity of sin is to be steadfastly resisted; anything which tends to excuse human "weaknesses" is to be rejected; anything which reduces that standard of absolute perfection which God requires us to constantly aim at—

every missing of which is a sin—is to be shunned.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" is parallel with, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross" (Matthew 16:24), and "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). In other words, this dehortation is a calling upon the Christian to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13), to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). There are two things which racers discard: all unnecessary burdens, and long flowing garments which would entangle them. Probably there is a reference to both of these in our text: the former being considered under "weights," or those things we voluntarily encumber ourselves with, but which should be dropped; the latter, "the sin which doth so easily beset us" referring to inward depravity.

"Let us lay aside every weight" is a call to the sedulous and daily mortification of our hearts to all that would mar communion with Christ: it is parallel with "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Titus 2:12). Everything which requires us to take time and strength away from God-appointed duties, everything which tends to bind the mind to earthly things and hinders our affections from being set upon things above, is to be cheerfully relinquished for Christ's sake. Everything which impedes my progress in running the race which God has set before me is to be dropped. But let it be carefully recognized that our text makes no reference to the dropping of duties which we have no right to lay aside. The performing of real and legitimate duty is never a hindrance to the spiritual life, though from a wrong attitude of mind and the allowance of the spirit of discontent, they often become so.

Many make a great mistake in entertaining the thought that their spiritual life is being much hindered by the very things which should, by Divine grace, be a real help to them. Opposition in the home from ungodly relatives, trials in connection with their daily work, the immediate presence of the wicked in the shop or office, are a real trial (and God intends they should be—to remind us we are still in a world which lieth in the Wicked one, to exercise our graces, to prove the sufficiency of His strength), but they need not be hindrances or "weights." Many erroneously suppose they would make much more progress spiritually if only their "circumstances" were altered. This is a serious mistake, and a murmuring against

God's providential dealings with us. He shapes our "circumstances" as a helpful discipline to the soul, and only as we learn to rise above "circumstances," and walk with God in them, are we "running the race that is set before us." The person is the same no matter what "circumstances" he may be in!

While the "weights" in our text have no reference to those duties which God requires us to discharge—for He never calls us to any thing which would draw us away from communion with Himself; yet they do apply in a very real sense unto a multitude of cares which many of God's people impose upon themselves—cares which are a grievous drag upon the soul. The artificial state in which many people now live, which custom, society, the world, imposes, does indeed bind many heavy burdens on the backs of their silly victims. If we accept that scale of "duties" which the fashion of this world imposes, we shall find them "weights" which seriously impede our spiritual progress: spending valuable time in reading newspapers and other secular literature in order to "keep up with the times," exchanging "social calls" with worldlings, spending money on all sorts of unnecessary things so as to be abreast of our neighbors, are "weights" burdening many, and those "weights" are sins.

By "weights," then, may be understood every form of intemperance or the immoderate and hurtful use made of any of those things which God has given us "richly to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Yes, to "enjoy" be it noted, and not only to use. The Creator has placed many things in this world—like the beautiful flowers and the singing birds—for our pleasure, as well as for the bare supply of our bodily needs. This should be borne in mind, for there is a danger here, as every where, of lopsidedness. We are well aware that in this age of fleshly indulgence the majority are greatly in danger of erring on the side of laxity, yet in avoiding this sin, others are in danger of swinging to the other extreme and being "righteous over much" (Ecclesiastes 7:16), adopting a form of monastic austerity, totally abstaining from things which Scripture in nowise prohibits.

Each Christian has to decide for himself, by an honest searching of Scripture and an earnest seeking of wisdom from God, what are "weights" which hinder him. While on the one hand it is wrong to assume an haughty and independent attitude, refusing to weigh in the balances of the sanctuary the conscientious scruples

and prejudices of fellow-Christians; on the other hand it is equally wrong to suffer any to lord it over our consciences, and deprive us of our Christian liberty. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." It is not the lawful use of God's creatures, but the intemperate abuse of them which Scripture condemns. More die from over eating than over drinking. Some constitutions are injured as much by coffee as by whiskey. Some are undermining their health by a constant round of exertions; others enervate themselves by spending too much time in bed.

The Greek word for "weights" is "tumor or swelling," so that an excrescence, a superfluity, is what is in view. A "weight" is something which we are at liberty to cast aside, but which instead we choose to retain. It is anything which retards our progress, anything which unfits us for the discharge of our God-assigned duties, anything which dulls the conscience, blunts the edge of our spiritual appetite, or chokes the spirit of prayer. The "cares of this world" weigh down the soul just as effectually as does a greedy grasping after the things of earth. The allowance of the spirit of envy will be as injurious spiritually as would an attendance at the movies. Fellowshiping at a Christ-dishonoring "church" quenches that Spirit as quickly as would seeking diversion at the dance hall. The habit of gossiping may do more damage to the Spiritual life than the excessive smoking of tobacco.

One of the best indications that I have entered the race is the discovery that certain things, which previously never exercised my conscience, are a hindrance to me; and the further I "run," the more conscious shall I be of the "weights"; and the more determined I am, by God's grace, to reach the winning post, the more readily shall I drop them. So many professing Christians never seem to have any "weights," and we never see them drop anything. Ah, the fact is, they have never entered the race. O to be able to say with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). When this is true of us, we shall not find it difficult, but rather easy to obey that injunction, "Go from the presence of a foolish man (or woman) when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge" (Prov. 14:7); and so with many other scriptural exhortations.

"And the sin which doth so easily beset (Greek "encompass") us." As we have already pointed out, the writer regards the "weights"

as external temptations which have to be resisted, evil habits which are to be dropped; and "the sin" as referring to indwelling corruption, with a special reference (as the whole context suggests) to the workings of unbelief: compare Hebrews 3:13. It is true that each of us has some special form of sin to which we are most prone, and that he is more sorely tempted from one direction than another; but we think it is very clear from all which precedes our text that what the apostle has particularly in mind here is that which most seeks to hinder the exercise of faith. Let the reader ponder John 16:8, 9.

"This is confirmed by the experience of all who have been exercised in this case, who have met with great difficulties in, and have been called to suffer for, the profession of the Gospel. Ask of them what they have found in such cases to be their most dangerous enemy; what hath had the most easy and frequent access unto their minds, to disturb and dishearten them, of the power thereof they have been most afraid; they will all answer with one voice, it is the evil of their own unbelieving hearts. This hath continually attempted to entangle them, to betray them, in taking part with all outward temptations. When this is conquered, all things are plain and easy unto them. It may be some of them have had their particular temptations which they may reflect upon; but any other evil by sin, which is common unto them all, as this is, they can fix on none" (John Owen).

But how is the Christian to "lay aside" indwelling sin and its particular workings of unbelief? This injunction is parallel with Ephesians 4:22, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." And how is that to be done? By heeding the exhortation of Romans 6:11, 12, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." In other words, by faith's recognition of my legal oneness with Christ, and by drawing from His fullness. Indwelling sin is to be "laid aside" by daily mortification (Rom. 8:13), by seeking grace to resist its solicitations (Titus 2:11, 12), by repenting, confessing, and forsaking the effects of its activities (Prov. 28:13), by diligently using the means which God has provided for holy living (Gal. 5:16).

"Run with patience the race that is set before us."

Perseverance or endurance is the prime prerequisite for the discharge of this duty. The good-ground hearer brought forth fruit "with patience" (Luke 8:15). We are bidden to be "followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:12). The "race" appointed is a lengthy one, for it extends throughout the whole of our earthly pilgrimage. The course is narrow, and to the flesh, rough. The racer often becomes disheartened by the difficulties encountered. But "Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9).

But how is this needed "patience" to be acquired? A twofold answer is given, the second part of which will be before us in the next article. First, by heeding the encouragement which is here set before us: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside... let us run." The reference is to the heroes of faith mentioned in the previous chapter: they compose a testimony for God, and speak unto future generations to be constant as they were. They witness to how noble a thing life may be when it is lived by faith. They witness to the faithfulness of God who sustained them, and enabled them to triumph over their foes, and overcome their difficulties. In likening these numerous witnesses unto a "cloud" there is no doubt a reference unto the Cloud which guided Israel in the wilderness: they followed it all the way to Canaan! So must we follow the noble example of the O.T. saints in their faith, obedience, and perseverance.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us." This is mentioned as an incentive, to console and assure us we are not alone. As we look around at the empty profession on every side, and behold the looseness and laxity of so many who bear the name of Christ, Satan seeks to make us believe that we are wrong, too "strict," and rebukes us for our "singularity." No doubt he employed the same tactics with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses; but they heeded him not. Nor should we. We are not "singular": if faithful to Christ we are following "the footsteps of the flock" (Song 1:8). Others before us have trod the same path, met with the same hindrances, fought the same fight. They persevered, conquered, and won the crown: then "let us run." That is the thought and force of the opening words of our text.

"We who have still to walk in the narrow path which alone

leads to glory are encouraged and instructed by the cloud of witnesses, the innumerable company of saints, who testified amid the most varied circumstances of suffering and temptation, that the just live by faith, and that faith is the victory which overcometh the world. The memory of those children of God, whose lives are recorded for our learning and consolation, animates us, and we feel upheld as it were by their sympathy and by the consciousness, that although few and weak, strangers and pilgrims on earth, we belong to a great and mighty, nay, a victorious army, part of which has already entered into the land of peace" (Adolph Saphir).

Hebrews 12:2

Chapter 84 - The Object of Faith

The verse which is now to engage our attention continues and completes the important exhortation found in the one which was before us in the last article. The two verses are so closely related that only the requirements of space obliged us to separate them. The latter supplies such a blessed sequel to the former that it will be necessary to present a summary of our comments thereon. We saw that the Christian life, the life of faith and obedience, is presented under the figure of a "race," which denotes that so far from its being a thing of dreamy contemplation or abstract speculation, it is one of activity, exertion, and progressive motion, for faith without works is dead. But the "race" speaks not only of activity, but of regulated activity, following the course which is "set before us." Many professing Christians are engaged in multitudinous efforts which God has never bidden them undertake: that is like running round and round in a circle. To follow the appointed track means that our energies be directed by the precepts of Holy Writ.

The order presented in Hebrews 12:1 is the negative before the positive: there must be the "laying aside" of hindering weights, before we can "run" the race set before us. This order is fundamental, and is emphasized all through Scripture. There must be a turning from the world, before there can be a real turning unto the Lord (Isa. 55:7); self must be denied before Christ can be followed (Matthew 16:24). There must be a putting off the old man, before there can be any true putting on of the new man (Eph. 4:22-24). There has to be a "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," before we can "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 3:12). There has to be a "cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," before there can be any "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). We must "be not conformed to this world," before we can be "transformed by the renewing of our mind," so that we may "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2, 3).

Before the plants and flowers will flourish in the garden weeds must be rooted up, otherwise all the labors of the gardener will come to naught. As the Lord Jesus taught so plainly in the Parable of the Sower, where the "thorns" are permitted to thrive, the good Seed, the Word, is "choked" (Matthew 13:22); and it is very searching and solemn to note, by a careful comparison of the three records of it, that Christ interpreted this figure of the "thorns" more fully than any other single detail. He defined those choking "thorns" as "the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches," "the lust of other things and pleasures of this life." If those things fill and rule our hearts, our relish for spiritual things will be quenched, our strength to perform Christian duties will be sapped, our lives will be fruitless, and we shall be merely cumberers of the ground—the garden of our souls being filled with briars and weeds.

Hence it is that the first call in Hebrews 12:1 is "let us lay aside every weight." "Inordinate care for the present life, and fondness for it, is a dead weight for the soul, that pulls it down when it should ascend upwards and pulls it back when it should press forwards" (Matthew Henry). It is the practical duty of mortification which is here inculcated, the abstaining from those fleshly lusts "which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). The racer must be as lightly clad as possible if he is to run swiftly: all that would cumber and impede him must be relinquished. Undue concern over temporal affairs, inordinate affection for the things of this life, the intemperate use of any material blessings, undue familiarity with the ungodly, are "weights" which prevent progress in godliness. A bag of gold would be as great a handicap to a runner as a bag of lead!

It is to be carefully noted that the laying aside of "every weight" precedes "and the sin which does so easily beset us", which has reference to indwelling corruption. Each Christian imagines that he is very anxious to be completely delivered from the power of indwelling sin: ah, but our hearts are very deceitful, and ever causing us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. A criterion is given in this passage by which we may gauge the sincerity of our desires: our longing to be delivered from indwelling evil is to be measured by our willingness and readiness to lay aside the "weights." I may think I am earnestly desirous of having a beautiful garden, and may go to much expense and trouble in purchasing and planting some lovely flowers; but if I am too

careless and lazy to diligently fight the weeds, what is my desire worth? So, if I disregard that word "make not provision for the flesh unto the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14), how sincere is my desire to be delivered from "the flesh!"

"And let us run with patience the race that is set before us." For this two things are needed: speed and strength—"rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race" (Ps. 19:5): the one being opposed to sloth and negligence, the other to weakness. These are the prime requisites: strength in grace, diligence in exercise. Speed is included in the word "run", but how is the strength to be obtained? This "race" calls for both the doing and suffering for Christ, the pressing forward toward the mark set before us, the progressing from one degree of strength to another, the putting forth of our utmost efforts, the enduring unto the end. Ah, who is sufficient for such a task? First, we are reminded of those who have preceded us, many, a "great cloud": and their faith is recorded for our instruction, their victory for our encouragement. Yet that is not sufficient: their cases afford us a motive, but they do not supply the needed power. Hence, we are next told:

"Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (verse 2). "The cloud of witnesses is not the object on which our heart is fixed. They testify of faith, and we cherish their memory with gratitude, and walk with a firmer step because of the music of their lives. Our eye, however, is fixed, not on many, but on One; not on the army, but the Leader; not on the servants, but the Lord. We see Jesus only, and from Him we derive our true strength, even as He is our light of life" (Adolph Saphir). In all things Christ has the pre-eminence: He is placed here not among the other "racers," but as One who, instead of exemplifying certain characteristics of faith, as they did, is the "Author and Finisher" of faith in His own person.

Our text presents the Lord as the supreme Example for racers, as well as the great Object of their faith, though this is somewhat obscured by the rendering of the A.V. Our text is not referring to Christ begetting faith in His people and sustaining it to the end, though that is a truth plainly enough taught elsewhere. Instead, He is here viewed as the One, who Himself began and completed the whole course of faith, so as to be Himself the one

perfect example and witness of what faith is. It was because of "the joy set before Him"—steadily and trustfully held in view—that He ran His race. His "enduring of the cross" was the completest trial and most perfect exemplification of faith. In consequence, He is now seated at the right hand of God, as both the Pattern and Object of faith, and His promise is "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

It is to be duly noted that the little word "our" is a supplement, being supplied by the translators: it may without detriment, and with some advantage, be omitted. The Greek word for "Author" does not mean so much one who "causes" or "originates," as one who "takes the lead." The same word is rendered "Captain of our salvation" in Hebrews 2:10, and in Acts 3:15, the "Prince of life." There its obvious meaning is Leader or Chief, one going in advance of those who follow. The Savior is here represented as the Leader of all the long procession of those who had lived by faith, as the great Pattern for us to imitate. Confirmation of this is found in the Spirit's use of the personal name "Jesus" here, rather than His title of office—"Christ." Stress is thereby laid upon His humanity. The Man Jesus was so truly made like unto His brethren in all things that the life which He lived was the life of faith.

Yes, the life which Jesus lived here upon earth was a life of faith. This has not been given sufficient prominence. In this, as in all things, He is our perfect Model. "By faith He walked, looking always unto the Father, speaking and acting in filial dependence on the Father, and in filial reception out of the Father's fullness. By faith He looked away from all discouragements, difficulties, and oppositions, committing His cause to the Lord, who had sent Him, to the Father, whose will He had come to fulfill. By faith He resisted and overcame all temptation, whether it came from Satan, or from the false Messianic expectations of Israel, or from His own disciples. By faith He performed the signs and wonders, in which the power and love of God's salvation were symbolized. Before He raised Lazarus from the grave, He, in the energy of faith, thanked God, who heard Him alway. And here we are taught the nature of all His miracles: He trusted in God. He gave the command, 'Have faith in God', out of the fullness of His own experience" (Adolph Saphir).

But let us enter into some detail. What is a life of faith? First, it is a life lived in complete dependence upon God. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding... in all thy ways acknowledge Him" (Prov. 3:5, 6.) Never did any so entirely, so unreservedly, so perfectly cast himself upon God as did the Man Christ Jesus; never was another so completely yielded to God's will. "I live by the Father" (John 6:57) was His own avowal. When tempted to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger, He replied "man shall not live by bread alone." So sure was He of God's love and care for Him that He held fast to His trust and waited for Him. So patent to all was His absolute dependence upon God, that the very scorers around the cross turned it into a bitter taunt.—"He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him" (Ps. 22:8).

Second, a life of faith is a life lived in communion with God. And never did another live in such a deep and constant realization of the Divine presence as did the Man Christ Jesus. "I have set the Lord always before Me" (Ps. 16:8) was His own avowal. "He that sent Me is with Me" (John 8:29) was ever a present fact to His consciousness. He could say, "I was cast upon Thee from the womb: Thou art My God from My mother's belly" (Ps. 22:10). "And in the morning, rising a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). From Bethlehem to Calvary He enjoyed unbroken and unclouded fellowship with the Father; and after the three hours of awful darkness was over, He cried "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

Third, a life of faith is a life lived in obedience to God. Faith worketh by love (Gal. 5:6), and love delights to please its object. Faith has respect not only to the promises of God, but to His precepts as well. Faith not only trusts God for the future, but it also produces present subjection to His will. Supremely was this fact exemplified by the Man Christ Jesus. "I do always those things which please Him" (John 8:29) He declared. "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49) characterized the whole of His earthly course. Ever and anon we find Him conducting Himself. "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." He lived by every word of God. At the close He said, "I have kept My Father's commandments,

and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

Fourth, a life of faith is a life of assured confidence in the unseen future. It is a looking away from the things of time and sense, a rising above the shows and delusions of this world, and having the affections set upon things above. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), enabling its possessor to live now in the power and enjoyment of that which is to come. That which enthralls and enchains the ungodly had no power over the perfect Man: "I have overcome the world" (John 16:31), He declared. When the Devil offered Him all its kingdoms, He promptly answered, "Get thee hence, Satan." So vivid was Jesus' realization of the unseen, that, in the midst of earth's engagements, He called Himself "the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13).

"And so, dear brethren, this Jesus, in the absoluteness of His dependence upon the Father, in the completeness of His trust in Him, in the submission of His will to that Supreme command, in the unbroken communion which He held with God, in the vividness with which the Unseen ever burned before Him, and dwarfed and extinguished all the lights of the present, and in the respect which He had 'unto the recompense of the reward'; nerving Him for all pain and shame, has set before us all the example of a life of faith, and is our Pattern as in everything, in this too.

"How blessed it is to feel, when we reach out our hands and grope in the darkness for the unseen hand, when we try to bow our wills to that Divine will; when we seek to look beyond the mists of 'that dim spot which men call earth,' and to discern the land that is very far off; and when we endeavor to nerve ourselves for duty and sacrifice by bright visions of a future hope, that on this path of faith too, when He 'putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them,' and has bade us do nothing which He Himself has not done! 'I will put My trust in Him,' He says first, and then He turns to us and commands, 'Believe in God, believe also in Me'" (A. Maclaren, to whom we are indebted for much in this article).

Alas, how very little real Christianity there is in the world today! Christianity consists in being conformed unto the image of God's Son. "Looking unto Jesus" constantly, trustfully, submissively, lovingly; the heart occupied with, the mind stayed upon Him—that is the whole secret of practical Christianity. Just in proportion as I

am occupied with the example which Christ has left me, just in proportion as I am living upon Him and drawing from His fullness, am I realizing the ideal He has set before me. In Him is the power, from Him must be received the strength for running "with patience" or steadfast perseverance, the race. Genuine Christianity is a life lived in communion with Christ: a life lived by faith, as His was. "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21); "Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20)—Christ living in me and through me.

There are four things said in our text about the Savior's life, each of which we need to ponder carefully. First, the motive or reason which prompted Jesus to do and suffer, wherein He is presented as our example and encouragement: "who for the joy that was set before Him." Here is made known to us what was the final moving cause in His mind which sustained the Savior to a persevering performance of duty, and of the endurance of all sufferings that duty entailed. Various definitions have been given of that "joy," and probably all of them are included within its scope. The glory of God was what the Redeemer preferred above all things: Hebrews 10:5-9, but that glory was inseparably bound up with the personal exaltation of the Redeemer and the salvation of His Church following the accomplishment of the work given Him to do. This was "set before Him" in the everlasting covenant.

Thus the "joy" that was set before Jesus was the doing of God's will, and His anticipation of the glorious reward which should be given Him in return. Hebrews 12:2 sustains the figure used in the previous verse: it is as the model Racer our Savior is here viewed. At the winning-post hung a crown, in full view of the racers, and this was ever before the eye of the Captain of our salvation, as He pursued the course appointed Him by the Father. He steadily kept before Him the cheering and blissful reward: His heart laid hold of the Messianic promises and prophecies recorded in Holy Writ: He had in steady prospect that satisfaction with which the travail of His soul would be fully compensated. By faith Abraham looked forward to a "City" (11:10); by faith Isaac anticipated "things to come" (11:20); by faith Moses "had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (11:26); and by faith, Jesus lived and died in the enjoyment of that which was "set before Him."

Second, He "endured the cross." Therein we have the

Commander's example to His soldiers of heroic fortitude. Those words signify far more than that He experienced the shame and pain of crucifixion: they tell us that He stood steadfast under it all. He endured the cross not sullenly or even stoically, but in the highest and noblest sense of the term:—with holy composure of soul. He never wavered or faltered, murmured or complained: "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it" (John 18:11)! And He has left us an example that we should "follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21), and therefore does He declare, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross" (Matthew 16:24). Strength for this task is to be found by "looking unto Jesus," by keeping steadily before faith's eye the crown, the joy awaiting us.

Third, "despising the shame." Therein we see the Captain's contempt of whatever sought to bar His progress. We scarcely think of associating this word "despising" with the meek and lowly Jesus. It is an ugly term, yet there are things which deserve it. The Savior viewed things in their true perspective; He estimated them at their proper worth: in the light of the joy set before Him, He regarded hardship, ignominy, persecution, sufferings from men, as trifles. Here, too, He has left us "an example." But alas, instead of scorning it, we magnify and are intimidated by "the shame." How many are ashamed to be scripturally baptized and wear His uniform. How many are ashamed to openly confess Christ before the world. Meditate more upon the reward, the crown, the eternal joy—that outweighs all the little sacrifices we are now called upon to make.

Fourth, "and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Here we witness the Captain's triumph, His actual entrance into the joy anticipated, His being crowned with glory and honor. His "sitting down" denoted three things. First, rest after finished work, the race run. Second, being invested with dominion: He now occupies the place of supreme sovereignty: Matthew 28:18, Philippians 2:10. Third, being intrusted with the prerogative of judgment: John 17: 2, Acts 17:30. And what have these three things to do with us, His unworthy followers? Much indeed: eternal rest is assured the successful racer: Revelation 13:14. A place on Christ's throne is promised the overcomer: Revelation 3:21. Dominion too is the future portion of him who vanquishes this world: Revelation 2:26, 27. Finally, it is written "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? "Do ye not know we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor.

6:2, 3). "Joint heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

One other word in our text yet remains to be considered: "looking unto Jesus the Author (Captain) and Finisher (Perfecter) of our faith." We have already seen from the other occurrences of this term (in its various forms) in our Epistle, that it is a very full one. Here, we believe, it has at least a twofold force. First, Completer: Jesus is the first and the last as an example of confidence in and submission unto God: He is the most complete model of faith and obedience that can be brought before us. Instead of including Him with the heroes of faith in chapter 11, He is here distinguished from them, as being above them. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending: as there was none hitherto who could be compared with Him, so there will be none hereafter. "Author and Finisher" or "Captain and Completer" means Jesus is beyond all comparison.

The fact that we are bidden to be looking unto Jesus as "the Leader and Finisher of faith" also denotes that He perfects our faith. How? First, by His grace flowing into us. We need something more than a flawless Model set before us: who can in his own strength imitate the perfect Man? But Christ has not only gone before His own, He also dwells in their hearts by faith, and as they yield themselves to His control (and only so) does He live through them. Second, by leading us (Ps. 23:3) along the path of discipline and trial, drawing our hearts away from the things of earth, and fixing them upon Himself. He often makes us lonesome here that we may seek His companionship. Finally, by actually conducting us to glory: He will "come again" (John 14:2) and conform us to His image.

"Looking unto Jesus." The person of the Savior is to be the "mark" on which the eyes of those who are pressing forward for the prize of the high calling of God, are to be fixed. Be constantly "looking" to Him, trustfully, submissively, hopefully, expectantly. He is the Fountain of all grace (John 1:16): our every need is supplied by God "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Then seek the help of the Holy Spirit that the eye of faith be steadfastly fixed on Christ. He has declared "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," then let us add, "The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5, 6). Salvation is by grace, through faith: it is through "faith" we are

saved, not only from Hell, but also from this world (1 John 5:4), from temptation, from the power of indwelling sin—by coming to Christ, trusting in Him, drawing from Him.

What are the things which hinder us running? An active Devil, an evil world, indwelling sin, mysterious trials, fierce opposition, afflictions which almost make us doubt the love of the Father. Then call to mind the "great cloud of witnesses": they were men of like passions with us, they encountered the same difficulties and discouragements, they met with the same hindrances and obstacles. But they ran "with patience," they overcame, they won the victor's crown. How? By "looking unto Jesus": see Hebrews 11:26. But more: look away from difficulties (Rom. 4:19), from self, from fellow-racers, unto Him who has left us an example to follow, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, so that He is able to succor the tempted, strengthen the weak, guide the perplexed, supply our every need. Let the heart be centered in and the mind stayed upon HIM.

The more we are "looking unto Jesus" the easier will it be to "lay aside every weight." It is at this point so many fail. If the Christian denies self of different things without an adequate motive (for Christ's sake), he will still secretly hanker after the things relinquished, or ere long return to them, or become proud of his little sacrifices and become self-righteous. The most effective way of getting a child to drop any dirty or injurious object, is to proffer him something better. The best way to make a tired horse move more quickly, is not to use the whip, but to turn his head toward home! So, if our hearts be occupied with the sacrificial love of Christ for us, we shall be "constrained" thereby to drop all that which displeases Him; and the more we dwell upon the Joy set before us, the more strength shall we have to run "with patience the race that is set before us."