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THE PROPHECIC
History of the Church

**SOME EVILS WHICH AFFLICT CHRISTENDOM AND
THEIR REMEDY, AS DEPICTED BY THE LORD'S
OWN WORDS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES
(Rev. ii. and iii.)**

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LECTURE I

SPIRITUAL DECLINE AND THE JUDAIZING OF THE CHURCH (Rev. ii. 1-11)

WE are going, beloved friends, if the Lord enable us, to look at the addresses to the Seven Churches—not indeed in detail, but more especially certain parts of them—as representative of the state of Christendom as a whole from the time almost when the Lord left the earth until the time in which He comes again. Now, in the first place, it is only right that I should show you briefly what is my warrant for taking these addresses as applying in this way. I can only just indicate the reasons—the main one being the suitability of the application itself.

You find, then, that the Lord here is addressing, through His apostle, seven churches in Asia—a little district in the western part of what we call Asia Minor. But these seven churches are evidently taken up to represent the Church at large. In the first place they are remarkable as being *seven* in number. It is a number which, as you know, runs through the book of Revelation. You have not only these seven churches, but seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials, seven spirits of God and other sevens which everybody can see at once have a distinct significance as such. It is not a casualty that there are just seven. Now here we find the same number, which some of us will know to be one of the numbers which signify perfection, generally in a good sense, and indeed the perfection of Divine work. God completed everything in creation on the seventh day.

Again, to these seven churches the whole book of this prophecy is committed, evidently for us, and for all time, yet it is put into their hands; and thus they are made representatives of the Church at large.

Furthermore, the Lord presents Himself here in this chapter in the midst of the seven candlesticks. These candlesticks stand for the seven churches, as is said. There was a seven-*branched* candlestick in the tabernacle, or the temple;—here we have, as it were, the seven branches separated from one another, and standing alone. That seven-branched candlestick was the light of the sanctuary—the light of the priests. It was significant of Christ by the Holy Ghost (through the Word, of course), the light of His people. In this scene in Revelation, His people are looked upon as the “light,” not of the sanctuary, but “of the world,” and the candlesticks stand each upon its own base, significant of their position of responsibility. But here again it is not merely among seven Asiatic churches that He walks, nor only those who have this position: the seven churches are but representatives of the whole.

Furthermore, the whole book is a “prophecy”—a prophecy which reaches down to the very end of time, and even into eternity itself: a prophecy not of any local significance merely. Such an introduction, as merely concerned itself with a few churches in the apostles’ time, whose memory for most would otherwise be entirely passed away, would scarcely be in keeping with this character of the book itself. If they are prophecy, then the whole book evidently is one; and if prophetic of the condition of the Church at large, then how specially important for the servants of the Lord to whom He would show, for their own guidance, things that would shortly come to pass!

Then, furthermore, if you take the chapters themselves which contain these addresses, you find that in every one

of them there is the most solemn appeal to "every one that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Scarcely any part of Scripture has such constant, solemn injunction to attend to what is written. Surely, if we are to take the divine warning and admonition as applicable to ourselves, we must believe that these chapters have a very peculiar place in God's Word, and a very peculiar application to us all. Written and handed down from one generation to another, all that have an ear to hear are exhorted to attend. But, after all, the most satisfactory evidence that these addresses do belong to the Church at all times is this, that we can trace that application in the actual facts of its history, and this it is which it will be my endeavor to set before you in these lectures.

Now, first of all, let us understand what is the character of the book we have before us. We have a distinct title—a thing not usual in the Word; you seldom have a title to any of the books of Scripture. The first two verses here are evidently that, and the title is, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." He calls it a "revelation." He says distinctly it is an "unveiling," or disclosure, of certain things shortly to come to pass. Instead of being something which no one can understand, it is what God calls a "revelation."

We need not say that if God gave it to show these things to us, there will be no such obscurity about it as to defeat the object for which it is given. I venture to say, we shall not find it obscure, if we have honest hearts to receive it. You will find in the parable of the sower that it is the honest heart only that "understands." And then, also, it is a revelation to Christ's servants. It is to all, no doubt, but in that character. It is His *servants* that will have to do with the things. Their path will be in the midst of the things about which He is going to speak and His servants will need to discern between the

things which please or displease Him. But if we are not servants—if we have not that character, no doubt we shall find it hard; that is, if we seek speculative knowledge rather than practical.

To servants there is a distinct encouragement given with regard to hearing and reading the words of this prophecy: "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." If we could not understand them perfectly, I may say, and know without any doubt what these things apply to, how could we be expected to "keep the things written therein"? Because, if the thing is, after all, merely doubtful—what may or may not be so—it has no right in fact over you or me. We ought not to walk in doubtful paths. "Whatever is not of faith is sin;" and faith must have God's Word to support and justify it. And therefore I say again, if there was not something that could be distinctly laid hold of, and learned, and understood in its application to what is around us, the things in the midst of which we are living, we could not possibly be expected to keep "the things written therein."

Let us now look at the addresses themselves. In the first place, to the "Church at Ephesus." We have the Lord speaking in words simple enough, but which are as solemn as they are practical for us all today. Amidst much commendation of them,—and the Lord commends all He can,—He has this to say to them: "Thou hast left thy first love." "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love" (vers. 2-4).

That is the commencement of decline everywhere—with every one of us; and if this applies to any one of us at this time, let us remember that we are “fallen,” and can never be right until restored to that first state.

I want you to notice how much the Lord can commend even where He finds such serious fault. “I know thy works,” He says; but not merely works,—“thy labor.” That is energetic work. But again, labor in the midst of a scene like this is apt to break down under the disappointment and discouragement incident to it. The Ephesians had not broken down; they had “patience,” quiet endurance. They went on laboring in spite of discouragement. Then, again, patience is apt to degenerate into toleration of the evil which we are so constantly meeting. They, however, “could not bear them which were evil.” It was commendation of them that they showed no such liberality as people often now would have. Such toleration is inconsistent with the love of truth and good.

Evil, too, was showing itself in high places already. It is remarkable to see that at the very commencement there were those already “saying they were apostles, and who were not.” Let us mark that: it will be important to remember it in another connection by and by. We know what that pretension ripened into in later times, and that it still exists. We must not be daunted by it any more than the Ephesians were: “Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”

Furthermore, they had borne and suffered, and for Christ’s name had labored. There was true love to Christ: there was not the first freshness of it, but there *was* true love to Christ underlying it all. There was much fruit; but the Lord had this to say: “Nevertheless I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love.” There is no “somewhat:” that would look as if it were a little thing that the Lord was speaking of, whereas it

was as great a thing as could well be. After that, it is solemn to see that even Balaam-teachers were but comparatively a "few things" more. But He never calls *this* "somewhat." The Lord is jealous of our hearts—of our love, because He loves us; and it is not a little thing for Him to see our love declining—to see the first freshness of it gone.

I want to put it in a very practical way—I want to ask you who, by your coming here tonight, take the position of Christians—of those who have known Christ,—I want to ask you, as I would ask myself, whether you know what "first love" is, and whether you have this "first love" now? There is this characteristic of it—and I have no doubt your memories will justify me here—that first love is an engrossing thing.

You know how any new thing is apt to take possession of one. It has passed into a proverb. But in the case of first love it is pre-eminently characteristic of it that it absorbs the subject of it. If we remember what it was when first of all our eyes were opened to see what Christ was, and to call Him ours,—our Saviour,—to receive what He had done for us, I think we shall confess a common experience; that for a while at least, short or long as it may be, His love possessed us; there was nothing else to contest the place with Him. And if it is otherwise now—if we have got down to a quieter and more moderate estimate of Him, and can find room and time for many an object of which Christ is only one among others—we may think it perhaps wisdom even, rightly surviving the heat of youth, when *He* is saying to us, "Thou art fallen, thou hast left thy first love." That is what you find, for instance, in the apostle Paul, who, I believe, never relinquished his from first to last. What you find in the Epistle to the Philippians is that his love had that engrossing character. He gave himself up to the object of it; very deliberately too, but en-

tirely and undistractedly. He had "one thing" before him; one idea possessed him. It made him, no doubt, what people would call narrow and one-sided. Nevertheless these are the men—to put it in that way—that make their mark in the world. Few men but get distracted with a number of objects; while, on the other hand, if you find a man bent upon one thing, absorbed with the desire, you will find generally (of course, I cannot say universally in a world like this) that that man in a great measure realizes his desire. What he pursues he pursues earnestly, concentrating his faculties upon his object, and he succeeds. If it is money, he will get money, and so on. For success, in other things at least, I suppose every one will grant there is nothing like entire occupation with one thing. Now it is distinctly this that the Lord claims for Himself. We may easily imagine as love grows cool, that we are only acquiring wisdom; that we were extreme and enthusiastic; that the natural heat of first days is passed and ought to pass away; that we are only wiser, when in fact we are less spiritual and less devoted,—I surely believe, less *happy* too. For, oh, there is nothing like the happiness of an absorbing and responsive affection which eternal and infinite love has awakened towards itself. And I say again, the apostle Paul at least was not one of these prudent ones; and he says distinctly that we are to follow him *as he followed Christ!*

For him to live was Christ, and Christ sufficed for him. These are what you find together in the Philippians. Take care you keep them together. In the first chapter you have a man for whom to live was Christ; and that man, you find in the last chapter, Christ *perfectly sufficed*. He had learned, in whatever state he was, to be content; he knew both how to be abased and how to abound; everywhere, and in all things, he was instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and

suffer need. He was not elated by prosperity nor cast down by adversity: always, in whatever state, content. How? He reveals the secret: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." Now, do not imagine that every Christian can say that. Can any of us say so? It is of no use, of course, to urge what Christ can do. Christ can do everything; but the question is, do we practically so know Christ as to be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me?" If not, what is the reason? Failure as to the first principle—"For me to live is Christ."

Fruit may look very beautiful on the outside, and yet, after all, not be ripe for the Master's taste; so here a great deal of fruit there was which looked fair enough, but *it had not hung in the sun enough*. It was not ripe for the Master's use. Now, we are not in a right state to judge anything—even to discern what evil is—except our hearts are really right with Him. The Lord is giving us here what was the root of all the evil we find afterward. For if our hearts lose their freshness of love to Christ,—that is to say, if Christ has less of our hearts than once He had,—something else will surely come in to fill the gap. If nature, as they say, abhors a vacuum, our hearts surely do; and if Christ is not filling them the world, in some shape or other, will be brought in to fill the void. It surely will be so. But then, there is no satisfaction there. What is the world? If you take the apostle's own estimate (or rather God's by him), it is this: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world." Lust and pride; and that is all! Does lust satisfy? Lust is just unsatisfied desire. Does the pride of life? Alas! the pride of life is but twin brother of envy—another form of lust. And then "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Is not that enough of itself to destroy satisfaction? Now if what I pursue is only

lust, the result is, the void becomes greater, and I become, alas,—if the Lord does not come in and stop me,—only more reckless and infatuated in the pursuit. One step of departure leads to another; and what about the Word of God, and its wholesale judgment of the world and all that belongs to it? Shall I take it truthfully? Shall I wish to apply it in its full force to the very things I am seeking after? The necessary result is that my judgment is warped as to what the world is, and I find it hard to believe that evil is just as evil as God's Word would have it. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" So the course hastens downward. Save God alone, nothing can stop one in it.

Do not wonder, then, that you have here the root of all the evil that has sprung up in the Church, and do not let us sit down and judge this thing and that thing in what we find around us, while at the same time we have the root of it all unjudged in our own souls. I do press it on you, and on myself alike, that if Christ has not our hearts fully,—if our business, our pleasure, our whole life in fact, is not really truthfully, honestly devoted to Him (I am not speaking now of realized absolute consistency, we all have to own much inconsistency, but still) if to give Him all is not the purpose of our hearts, there is really no proper fellowship with Him, and of course no power to judge truly what evil is. To have part with Him, He must cleanse, as He said: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." But if we put our feet into His blessed hands, we must put them there without reserve. If *He* washes, it must be according to His thought of what defilement is; and if He does not cleanse, we can have no part with Him. He cannot bear fellowship with evil; but as a consequence, our fellowship with Him is gone. The least reserve—the least deliberate keeping back from Christ what is rightfully His—these hearts that He toiled so for and has taken so much pains

to win—the least conscious keeping back from Him is, so to speak, fatal. The freshness of our souls is gone. I am sure, as we go on with Him, He will show us more and more what this and that is, and that the judging all these things is more or less a practical work. Our eyes clear more and more as we are with Him, and we learn more and more to call things by their names, and see them as they really are. While all that is true, and while there is thus a growth in practical sanctification, yet the surrender that He calls for from us, from the beginning and throughout, is an entire and unreserved surrender.

There is no use in our going on with these addresses except we can honestly say, "Well, at any rate, my heart's desire is to give Christ all." It is no use trying to go further else. You cannot learn God's truth as a school-boy learns his lesson. It is not merely for the head; it is for the heart. The eyes to see it are of the heart, and not the head; and I put it to your heart as to where you are. It is solemn to think of its being *Ephesus* that is thus addressed. Had it been Corinth or Galatia, we should have said, the evil began with them from the beginning almost. But this is Ephesus, the very first, as one might say, of apostolic churches, and the one to whom especially had been committed the deposit of Church-truth. Failure here leaves us to ask, And where not, if at Ephesus? And in truth, if we only look at the epistles to the various churches, we shall have no difficulty in seeing that long before apostolic days were over, the fresh, bright days of the primitive Church were gone. The warnings and reproofs of the early epistles change to solemn and emphatic statements in the latter. At Rome all sought their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. "All they that are in Asia have departed from me," says the apostle to Timothy. The mystery of iniquity was already working. In John's days already there were many antichrists who had gone out from them; and, in-

side still, such as Diotrephes resisting openly the yet living apostle, and casting true brethren out of the church.

The prophetic warnings carry this on to the very "last days" of Christendom. Evil men and seducers should wax worse and worse. False teachers should bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and many follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth would be evil spoken of. The "last days" would be specially "perilous times"—men having the form of godliness and denying the power thereof. And the man of sin, the heading up of evil already at work, would crown the final apostasy, and receive judgment from the Lord's own hand at His appearing.

We are prepared, then, to find the aspect of things getting darker as we proceed with these addresses. Even in spite of corrective measures, which the Lord's faithful love could not but provide, if even yet they might be roused up to a sense of their condition, and return, truly and effectually, to Himself.

This discipline it is we find accordingly taking effect in the next epistle to the church in Smyrna,—the persecution which everybody knows broke out in the days of the heathen emperors. The "tribulation ten days" has been referred to thus by those who had no thought of any application of these addresses to the state of the Church at large. The justification of it by the history is undoubted in this case. But here you find that the Lord comes in, in the most gracious and tender way, though not to take them out of it, because He had His own purpose in their going through it. He wanted them to learn from the world how thoroughly in opposition to God it was. He would force them, as it were, by the great outward pressure, back to Himself, that there they might learn as there only they could, the true character of that which

was creeping in; and therefore He lets them go through it, bidding them only be "faithful unto death." *He* had been so; had "resisted unto blood, striving against sin." He had gone through it, and taken away its sting. He gives them the assurance of His sympathy. By and by He would give them the crown of life.

Individually, multitudes were thus faithful. Nevertheless we must not imagine that in general the state of things improved. On the contrary, I want you to notice that there is a class of people spoken of here who are very distinctly brought into notice, and whom the Lord as thoroughly reprobates. If we have skill in reading the symbolic language which is everywhere here employed, we shall have no difficulty in regard to who they are, or to their place at this time in ecclesiastical history. The class of people which He refers to are depicted in these vivid words: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich,) *and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN.*"

He does not speak of these, then, as the people He is addressing; but do not let us imagine that on that account they were outside, and not in fact an existing party in the Church. It is in accord with the character of these epistles that the Lord does not address these. It is just the same with the Nicolaitans, the followers of Balaam, and the woman Jezebel, who must be all admitted to have been inside the professing church. But He could not reckon those who were tools of Satan as among those who had an ear to hear. That they called themselves Jews too does not imply that they did not profess to be Christians also, for in fact they might be confounding Judaism and Christianity together; and this we know took place almost from the beginning, and the apostle Paul had everywhere to resist it. But these are not Jews, although they say they are. Had they been

such, they would scarcely have needed to profess it so. Now Satan is the great adversary of Christ, the one continually seeking to destroy His work, as Christ, on the other hand, comes to destroy the works of the devil. This was the synagogue of Satan, a Jewish party, the tool of Satan in his effort to destroy Christ's work. They were not Jews really at all, but people taking Jewish ground, the ground of the synagogue, and blaspheming (or slandering) the true followers of Christ. It is slander, not persecution, such as from the world outside, that they are charged with; and the name by which the Lord calls them may instruct us sufficiently as to their real character. The "synagogue" is the Jewish word for their gathering, as the Christian word everywhere used is "assembly." The word "church," we need scarcely say, is a word that really has no existence anywhere in the Word of God: it is the product of later times. This is well known, and there is nothing peculiar in saying so. Everyone who is acquainted with the original will allow it. At the same time it is of the greatest importance to keep this clearly in mind. If I speak of the "assembly," of course it could not possibly be confounded with walls, with bricks and mortar; yet that is one notorious abuse of the word "church."

Then, again, if I speak of the Christian assembly as it is in Scripture, *i. e.*, the "assembly which is Christ's body" I cannot think of anything else than the gathering of all His members. Church membership is nothing else or other than membership of the body of Christ, and there cannot be many bodies of Christ, but only one, and that containing all true Christians. How, then, can we speak of the Church teaching or anything of that sort? What is this Church that teaches? The Church is the whole company of teachers and taught alike. What they call church-teaching is only the teaching of certain teachers in past generations, accepted more or less widely

in after times. But that is not the Church at all. The restoration (were it possible) of the true word "assembly" would destroy many of these fancies at the very outset.

Now, let us mark, there is a difference between the Jewish and the Christian words. The word for the New Testament "assembly," "*ecclesia*," is derived from two words meaning "called out." It is not merely a gathering; it is a gathering of people who are distinctly "called out" from others. On the other hand, "synagogue" is a mere "gathering *together*." It is no gathering *out*; and this very precisely distinguishes the Jewish from the Christian gathering.

Now in order to see what that means, let us look briefly at what Judaism was. It was a probationary system, in which God was trying man, to see if He could get anything out of him that He could accept—trying man, to see if, by any assistance He could give him, he could by any possibility make out a righteousness for himself, and stand before Him on the basis of his own doings. In Judaism God gave man the law as the measure of obedience which He required, in order that he might see His face and live. But he never did see God's face, and never could see it, on those terms. The moment you see what the law is, you cannot have any doubt that it must effectually exclude man from God's presence forever. Everybody at once will say: "If I have got to love God with all my heart and mind and strength, and my neighbor as myself, I have not done it, do not do it, and can not do it." Now if these are the terms upon which man is to stand before God by his own work, then it is absolutely impossible for a man to come into His presence in that way. He is certainly excluded; and that is exactly what the law was given for. Says the apostle: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be

stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. iv. 19). That was not merely the actual effect of it, but it was the *designed* effect of it. Its sentence says, "There is none righteous; no, not one."

That sentence was the end of the trial—the end of man's probation. It is the end of the trial when sentence is given. The apostle points out to the Jews that sentence had now been given—given by their own law. The trial of man as to this was ended. It is no use for a moment speaking as if the trial were going on, after sentence has been given. "There is none righteous"—Abraham or Moses, for that matter. The trial is over, the sentence is given, and that is the issue of the law—its foreseen and designed issue—every mouth stopped, and man guilty. I know it is very hard for us to receive this, the law being God's holy, good and righteous law. But the truth is, that the very issue of it as a trial lay in this, that God was taking man up *on his own ground*. If you take all the forms of religion everywhere, you will find, some way or other, they are law-keeping—doing something in order to live. It is the universal principle of what is called "natural religion"—it is the principle of works for acceptance with God; and no wit or wisdom of man has been able to devise another way. That is exactly what Scripture says as to the law. It was the "principles" or "elements of the world." It is what the world everywhere recognizes and acts upon, and rightly as between man and man. Laws are necessary to keep the world in any tolerable condition. We could not live but for them. Now what man finds so necessary in this way he naturally takes up as the principle between God and himself, and even there he is in measure right. The trouble is, he does not know, and would not like to believe, that on that ground he is simply lost, and nothing else; and thus he would bring the measure of what is required down to what he believes to be the measure of his ability, and thus evade the righteous and inevitable sentence.

The law, then, chimes in with the natural thoughts of man's heart everywhere. But he finds it hard to realize that God gave that law simply for the purpose of condemning; for he does not know the heart of God or the resources of His love; and if the law condemn, he sees nothing beyond. All this effort is therefore to escape judgment; but this he cannot, for God is holy and cannot pare down His law; and, on the other hand, *no* paring down will suffice to give man assurance before God. If sin be a matter of judgment with God, how can man appear before Him with it? The truth is, he is lost; but he will not face the truth. There was one thing, therefore, characteristic of Judaism, as there is one thing characteristic of Christianity. In Judaism it was characteristic that God was hidden; while the one thing characteristic of Christianity is, that God is revealed. "The Lord has said that He would dwell in thick darkness," says Solomon. "God is in the light," says the apostle. "No man hath seen God at any time: the Only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." "He that hath seen Me," says the Son Himself, "hath seen the Father." Judaism and Christianity are thus in essential contrast. The unrent veil, the way into the holiest not made manifest, God essentially unknown—that is Judaism; and the very names by which God is called show this: He is the Almighty, the Eternal, (perhaps the nearest interpretation of Jehovah), the Highest. None of these names tell me His heart. The Almighty! How will He use His power? Eternity, Sovereignty—all these are not *Himself*. But the Son, His well-beloved, comes into the scene—becomes a Man—to be near to man—and He reveals the *Father*. There I know Himself.

At the second giving of the law, when, together with law, God spoke of mercy, a gleam of the glory lighted up Moses' face; still it was Jehovah only who appeared. And while it is true He declares Himself as "the Lord,

the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," He has to add (because it was still law, which the tables of stone, word for word, again contained), "and that will *by no means clear the guilty.*" But then, what hope for man, who surely is that? Although God could thus say, as to the wicked man, as He does in Ezekiel, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is *lawful* and right, he shall save his soul alive," still the unrelaxed measure there is still law. Mercy might deal with his past sins and give him a new beginning, but the new leaf he turned over, could he keep it unblotted? Could he ever bring to God the unblotted leaf which He required? Alas, never; he never could save his soul. And the law in its mildest form only made man's deep depravity the more apparent. It was what the apostle calls it, "the ministration of death," and the "ministration of condemnation." And therefore Moses, at the mount, still only saw God's back parts, and not His face. Therefore, also, the unrent veil through all the days of Judaism still showed that "the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest." What was made manifest was but the uselessness of all man's efforts to see God and live.

Now as to the essential characteristic of Christianity.

First. It was *not* the modification of law: it did not come to make that still milder. On the contrary, the Christian revelation maintains the law in its utmost rigor. It is a Christian apostle who insists that "if a man keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James ii. 20). And it is another apostle who tells us that "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: *for it is written*, Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10).

Christianity maintains, then, not abrogates, the righteous condemnation of all upon that ground—upon the ground of works of any kind, that is; for every point of man's duty is covered by the law. Sentence has been given; the trial of man is ended. He is "ungodly;" and more, he is "without strength" too. Nothing in the way of goodness or righteousness can be expected from him. What, then, remains? Why, God can show out Himself. He could not do it as long as the trial was going on. Man would naturally have said, I have performed my part of the agreement; I have kept the covenant. Therefore God had to keep His face veiled to man continually. But as soon as there was no doubt at all that man never could make his way in, never could stand before God at all, then—at the time when man's sin had reached its height, when the Son of God hung dead upon the cross man had given Him, when the carnal mind had shown out thus its enmity against God in the completest way, —*God's own hand rent the veil from top to bottom*; and by that precious bloodshedding there was a way made to go in to God, and for God, on the other hand, to come out to meet man. Yes, a Man indeed found His way into the presence of God, and sat down there by virtue of His work; but it was the *Man, God's fellow* (Zech. xiii. 7). And the way by which He entered was henceforth a way of access, consecrated and made safe for sinners by the virtue of His precious blood.

That is what characterizes Christianity. God has come in with His grace in a way independent of man's work altogether. There is no more any mixture allowed or possible. As the apostle says, "If it be of grace, it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace" (Rom. xi. 6). There is nothing more emphatic than that: you cannot mix these two principles. The gospel of Christianity is grace. God is not requiring from man except that he receive what He offers. He is not asking

for righteousness; He is "ministering" it. The sinners exposed and condemned by the law are by the gospel welcomed and set at rest. He who by law could not clear the guilty, by the work of His Son justifies the ungodly. It is God that justifieth. Because "Christ died for the ungodly," He "justifies the ungodly." We are able, then, by the blood of Christ, to go right into God's presence and see Him face to face. And God who was behind the veil and "in thick darkness," is, as the apostle John says, "in the light." And that glory out of which we were once shut, becomes our permanent and peaceful home. But now mark, if that be the case, Christianity at once brings people into a distinct place of acceptance with God and relationship to Him, which Judaism never possibly could give. It brings out, as distinguished from the world, a people reconciled and at peace with God. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He *right* to become sons of God" (John i. 12, margin).

In Christianity you have thus the "calling *out*" of those who are able to take their place as children of God. In Judaism there was the mixing up, as people might say now, of the Church and world together. There was no separation, and none possible. In Judaism men were yet being tried, and nobody could take his place as a child of God in the true sense, as born of Him. Nobody could call God in that sense his Father. The apostle tells us in the fourth of Galatians that the true children, though heirs, were in their time of nonage, "under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the Father," and "differing nothing from servants, though lords of all." At school, with the schoolmaster, children say "sir," or "master," and not "father." So also in that condition they would say: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. cxliii. 2).

True, God was a Father to *Israel*; but *Israel* was a

nation in the flesh—a mingled company of sinners and saints together. There was, there could be, no marking out the one from the other. There was no assembly of saints distinct from sinners. The only calling *out* was of Israel from the Gentiles, the type only, and in some sense the very contrast, of the calling out of Christians from the world. Thus in Judaism there was complete mingling. In Christianity there is now the separation of God's children, who are exhorted distinctly to come out and be separate from unbelievers, in order really to enjoy their place as that (2 Cor. vi. 14-18). Judaism was not in this sense a "calling out," but a mere "synagogue"—a "gathering *together*." There, in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John, where Caiaphas unconsciously prophesies that Christ should "die for that nation" (Israel), the apostle adds, "and not for that nation only, but also that He might gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." That was one purpose of the death of Christ, that He might be able now to gather together in one the children of God scattered, in fact, by Judaism itself. The Church of God is the assembly of those who, no longer on trial, have the place already of God's children, and, as baptized of the Spirit, Christ's members; whose acceptance is ascertained and settled forever—of grace and not of works, nor mingled with them. The bringing in of Judaism again into the Church was the bringing in of distance between man and God. It was putting back the veil which God had rent on the cross—putting God in the darkness again, and man still under trial, to find his way to meet God and stand before Him if he could. It was putting distance between God and man, of necessity, and covering the blessed face of God which He had revealed in Christ. Call it High Church or what you please, that is what it still is. Of necessity, therefore, it is the remingling of the Church and world together. Because, if they are on trial, nobody

knows which is which, you cannot separate saint from sinner, all are together on trial; you cannot, then, separate the children of God from the children of the world.

Now, if you look around, that is what you will find exactly almost everywhere. The results of that awful change from assembly to synagogue are everywhere visible. In the epistle to the Galatians we see what was coming into the Church in the apostle's time; and you know how earnest he is about it: "I would they were even cut off," he says, and warns them, if any one came and brought a different gospel, (not another, for there were not two), he was to be "anathema"—accursed.

That Judaism has got lodgment in the Church of God means nothing less than the destruction of it in its true character. The first point of departure (after what we were looking at in Ephesus) is the loss, in the true sense, of the very Church itself; and this was before uninspired church-history began. Startling to say, we never have the true Church historically existent as that any more. If an ecclesiastical historian can say, "The annals of the Church are the annals of hell," we may surely own that what he is speaking of is not the Church (except in responsibility), but the synagogue of Satan! Is the term too strong? Alas—while Christians are no doubt scattered through it—is the church of Rome, or of Constantine, or even further back, anything better as a whole than the miserable travesty of the true Church, Christ's body? Under whom but under Satan have men wrought to make it so? And every fresh departure from the truth is some fresh growth, in fact, of Judaism. No wonder, since it is man's religion naturally, and he has never been able to produce another. Baptized it may be, and transformed outwardly, no doubt. Men may be called Christians, although they hardly dare call themselves so; "members of Christ," made so by a sacrament; bishops may give the Holy Ghost as freely as apostles ever did,

if *words* may be taken for divine realities! Alas, under it all, and at no great depth, the beautiful form is hollow as a mask,—a whitened sepulchre of impurity itself. Only,—so many are defiled—it has become the fashion, and is not to be talked of; he that departs from iniquity makes himself a prey. Look around, beloved friends, and at least it will not be hard to recognize the forms of Judaism, nor to hear the language of the synagogue, again set up. Doubtless they call themselves Christians, who, if you ask them are they *Christ's*, will think you have no business to inquire; and if you set up to be His, will wonder at your presumption. If *you* have no doubt, they will doubt for you. With them, men are still under trial, and they do not know how it will turn out. As in Judaism, you find everything to act upon man through his eye, his ear, his emotional nature: architecture and imposing spectacles; music and oratorical appeals; everything to wake up the religious sentiment in a being who is not wholly “lost.” As I have said, although called Christians, you are not to judge if they be really such. They are church-members; but the true Church is invisible, and they know not where it is. They have practical working churches which do well enough. Have they eternal life?—they would be afraid to say. Forgiveness of sins?—they do not know. Are they children of God?—who knows? It is charity to suppose they are, and they will accredit you if you will accredit them. Is not that what you find on every side almost? A mixture of the Church and the world follows, of course. Separation is reprobated. It is Pharisaism—pretending to be better than your neighbor.

All that is just really what we have here. It is the world gathered together, as the substitute for God's gathering of His own. God is gathering people *out* of the world; a people who are “not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world.” As to the Church, it is practically

gone. The world of necessity comes in like a flood, and the children of God are swamped. They call it the "religious world," and so it is, although believers there are in it, many—overridden, bemired, and in bondage; a bondage which they feel, while they cannot break through it. If there be any fundamental differences between the Church and the world, what must ensue from that mixture? The Church becomes the world, and the world the Church. "All that is of the world" is necessarily found in it. To this day "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are all there, and flourishing; and who rules over the world? Who is its god and prince?

I close here to-night with just an application. You will, I hope, not misunderstand me, or think that I am confounding all Christendom together under the awful title we have been examining. God's own Church still exists, thank God. Its members are to be found on all sides, though, alas, scattered, and largely refusing true union with one another for the sake of alliances which, if they had eyes to see, they would recognize as of the world. I do not forget that we of this day are heirs to evils which come to us sanctioned by great names, and by dear ones. I must not shrink on that account from calling them by their true titles: I am bound the more to do it. It is those who lent themselves in very early times to change the true Church of God into a Jewish gathering upon legal principles, confounding His people and the world together, whom He denounces as Satan's synagogue. But alas, the attempt was largely successful. Men slept. The sad results are with us to-day. The practice and the principles remain—widely diffused, long and almost universally accepted. The true Church has disappeared—is invisible. Of God's light for the world a few scattered lights appear, dim enough amid the darkness.

How far to yourselves or in general the principles I have described apply, you must discern for yourselves. Only let us be honest and be earnest. Let us not scruple to call evil that, because good men have practised it. And what we see as evil, let us refuse with our whole hearts. Let us refuse to call law gospel—to sanction it or listen to it. Let us remember the apostle's fearless and scathing words; had I used such to-night, what would people say? Let us refuse, too, complicity with what has changed the face of the professing Church, until the features of Christ's spouse are no more visible. Let us refuse the yoke with unbelievers, even though they be baptized and orthodox unbelievers. It is the Lord who says, not I, that we must do so that He may *be*, practically, to us the Father that He is. With these words let us close: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (an unbeliever). "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. vi. 14-18).

LECTURE II

 NICOLAITANISM; OR, THE RISE AND GROWTH OF CLERISY
 (Rev. ii. 12-17)

WE are now going to look carefully at that fifteenth verse: "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

This next stage of the Church's journey in its departure, alas, from truth may easily be recognized historically. It applies to the time when, after having passed through the heathen persecution, (and the faithfulness of many an Antipas was brought out by it,) it got publicly recognized and established in the world. The characteristic of this epistle is,—although I do not now dwell upon it, I hope to take it up another time,—the Church *dwell-
ing* where Satan's throne is. "Throne" it should be, not "seat." Now Satan has his throne, not in hell, (which is his prison, and where he never reigns at all,) but in the world. He is expressly called the "prince of this world." To dwell where Satan's throne is, is to settle down in the world, under Satan's government, so to speak, and protection. That is what people call the establishment of the Church. It took place in Constantine's time. Although amalgamation with the world had been growing for a long time more and more decided, yet it was then that the Church stepped into the seats of the old heathen idolatry. It was what people call the triumph of Christianity; but the result was that the Church had the things of the world now, as never before, in secure possession: the chief place in the world was hers, and the principles of the world everywhere pervaded her.

The very name of "Pergamos" intimates that. It is a word (without the particle attached to it, which is itself significant) meaning "marriage;" and the Church's marriage before Christ comes to receive her to Himself is necessarily unfaithfulness to Him to whom she is espoused. It is the marriage of the Church and *the world* which the epistle to Pergamos speaks of—the end of a courtship which had been going on long before.

There is something, however, which is really preliminary to this,—mentioned in the very first address—which I shall take up to-night, and which really comes in place here. I could not so well bring it in when we were looking at the address to Ephesus, because there it is evidently incidental, and does not characterize the state of things. In the address to Ephesus the Lord says: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the *deeds* of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (ii. 6). Here it is *more* than the "deeds" of the Nicolaitans. There are now not merely "deeds," but "doctrine." And the Church, instead of repudiating it, was holding with it. In the Ephesian days they *hated* the deeds of the Nicolaitans, but in Pergamos they "had," and did not reprobate, those who held the doctrine.

The serious question, then, is, How shall we interpret this? I answer that the word "Nicolaitans" is the only thing really which we have to interpret it by. People have tried very hard to show that there was a sect of the Nicolaitans, but it is owned by writers now, almost on all sides, to be very doubtful. Nor can we conceive why, in epistles of a prophetic character—which I trust I have shown these to have—there should be such repeated and emphatic mention of a mere obscure sect, about which people can tell us little or nothing, and that seems manufactured to suit the passage before us. The Lord solemnly denounces it: "which thing I hate." It must have a special importance with Him, and be of moment

in the Church's history—little apprehended as it may have been. And another thing which we have to remember is, that it is not the way of Scripture to send us to Church histories or to any history at all, in order to interpret its sayings. God's Word is its own interpreter, and we have not to go elsewhere in order to find out what is there. Otherwise it becomes a question of learned men searching and finding out for those who have not the same means or abilities—applications which must be taken on their authority alone. God does not leave us to that sort of thing. Besides, it is the ordinary way in Scripture, and especially in passages of a symbolical character, such as is the part before us, for the names to be significant. I need not remind you how abundantly in the Old Testament this is the case; and in the New Testament, although less noticed, I cannot doubt but that there is the same significance throughout. Here, if we are left simply to the name, I think the name alone is sufficiently startling and instructive. Of course, to those who spoke the language used the meaning would be no hidden or recondite thing, but as apparent as those of Bunyan's allegories.

It means, then, "*conquering the people.*" The last part of the word (*Laos*) is the word used in Greek for "people," and it is the word from which the commonly used term "Laity" is derived. The Nicolaitans were just those: "subjecting, putting down the laity," the mass of Christian people, in order unduly to lord it over them.

There is another word which is very striking in this connection, and found in this very address, side by side with this; a word quite alike to this "Nicolaitans," although it is a Hebrew word and not a Greek; as you have the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, so you have the "doctrine of Balaam;" and as Nicolaitans means "conquering the people," Balaam means "*destroying the people.*" You have pointed out what he "taught" Balak. Balaam's

doctrine was "to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication." For this purpose he enticed them to mixture with the nations, from which God had carefully separated them. That needful separation broken down was their destruction, so far as it prevailed. In like manner, we have seen the Church to be called out from the world, and it is only too easy to apply the Divine type in this case. But here we have a confessedly typical people, with a corresponding significant name, and in such close connection as naturally to confirm the reading of the similar word "Nicolaitans" as similarly significant. I shall have to speak more of this at another time, if the Lord will.

Let us notice now the development of Nicolaitanism. It is, first of all, certain people who have this character, and who—I am merely translating the word—first take the place of superiors over the people. Their "deeds" show what they are. There is no "doctrine" yet. But it ends, in Pergamos, with the *doctrine* of the Nicolaitans. The place is assumed now to be theirs by right. There is a doctrine, a teaching about it, received at least by some, and to which the Church at large—nay, true souls also, on the whole,—have become indifferent. Now what has come in between these two things—the "deeds" and the "doctrine"? It is what we looked at last time—the rise of a party whom the Lord marks out as those who said they were Jews and were not, but who were the synagogue of Satan—the adversary's attempt (alas, too successful) to Judaize the Church.

I was trying to show you last time what the characteristics of Judaism are. It was a probationary system, a system of trial, in which it was to be seen if man could produce a righteousness for God. We know the end of the trial, and that God pronounced "none righteous; no, not one." And only then it was that God could mani-

fest His grace. As long as He was putting man under trial He could not possibly open the way to His own presence and justify the sinner there. He had, as long as this trial went on, to shut him out. For on that ground nobody could see God and live. Now, the very essence of Christianity is that all are welcomed in. There is an open door and ready access, where the blood of Christ entitles every one, however much a sinner, to draw near to God, and to find at His hand justification as ungodly. To see God in Christ is not to die, but live. And what further is the consequence of this? Those who have come thus to Him—those who have found the way of access through the peace-speaking blood into His presence, learned what He is in Christ, and been justified before God—are able to take, and taught to take, a place distinct from all others, as now His—children of the Father, members of Christ, His body. That is the Church, a body called out separate from the world.

Judaism, on the other hand, necessarily mixed all together. Nobody there can take such a place with God. Nobody can cry “Abba, Father,” really; therefore there could not be any separation. This had been once a necessity, and of God, no doubt. But now, Judaism being set up again after God had abolished it, it is no use to urge that it was once of Him; its setting up again was the too successful work of the enemy against this gospel and against this Church. He brands these Judaizers as the “synagogue of Satan.”

Now you can understand at once, when the Church in its true character was practically lost sight of, when Church-members meant people baptized by water instead of by the Holy Ghost, or when the baptism of water and of the Holy Ghost were reckoned one, (and this very early became accepted doctrine,) then, of course, the Jewish synagogue was practically again set up. It became more and more impossible to speak of Christians being

at peace with God or saved. They were *hoping* to be, and sacraments and ordinances became means of grace to ensure, as far as might be, a far-off salvation.

Let us see how far this would help on the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. It is plain that when, and as, the Church sank into the synagogue, the Christian people became practically what of old the Jewish had been. Now, what was that position? As I have said, there was no real drawing near to God at all. Even the high priest, who (as a type of Christ) entered into the holiest once a year, on the day of atonement, had to cover the mercy-seat with a cloud of incense, that he might not die. But the ordinary priests could not enter there at all, but only into the outer holy place; while the people in general could not come in even there. And this was expressly designed as a witness of their condition. It was the result of failure on their part; for God's offer to them, which you may find in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus, was this: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people, for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be unto Me a *kingdom of priests*, and a holy nation."

They were thus conditionally offered equal nearness of access to God—they should be *all* priests. But this was rescinded, for they broke the covenant; and then a special family is put into the place of priests, the rest of the people being put into the background, and only able to draw near to God through these.

Thus a separate and intermediate priesthood characterized Judaism; and, for the same reason, what we should call now *missionary* work there was none. There was no going out to the world in this way; no provision, no command to preach the law at all. What, in fact, could they say? That God was in the thick darkness? That no one could see Him, and live? It is surely evident there was

no "good news" there. Judaism had no true gospel. The absence of the evangelist and the presence of the intermediate priesthood told the same sorrowful story, and were in perfect keeping with each other.

Such was Judaism. How different, then, is Christianity! No sooner had the death of Christ rent the veil and opened a way of access into the presence of God than at once there was a gospel, and the new order is, "Go out into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." God is making Himself known, and "is He the God of the Jews only?" Can you confine the gospel of Christ within the bounds of a nation? No, the fermentation of the new wine would burst the bottles.

The intermediate priesthood has, by the gospel, now been done away; for all Christian people are priests now to God. What was conditionally offered to Israel is now an accomplished fact in Christianity. We are a kingdom of priests; and in the wisdom of God it is Peter—ordained of man the great head of ritualism—who, in his first epistle, announces the two things which destroy ritualism root and branch for those who believe him. First, that we are "born again," not of baptism, but "by the word of God, that liveth and abideth forever; . . . and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Secondly, instead of a set of priests, he says to all Christians: "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (ii. 5). The sacrifices are spiritual—praise and thanksgiving, and our lives and bodies also (Heb. xiii. 15, 16; Rom. xii. 1). This is to be with us true priestly work, and thus do our lives get their proper character: they are the thank-offering service of those able to draw nigh to God.

In Judaism, let me repeat, none really drew nigh; but now, the people—the laity (for it is only a Greek word made English)—and that in a better way than the Jewish

priest could. The priestly caste, wherever it is found, means the same thing. There is no drawing nigh of the whole body of the people at all. It means distance from God and darkness—God shut out from the people.

Now, *THAT is the meaning of "the Clergy."* I want you to look at it very carefully. I want you not to think it a mere question of a certain order of Church government—as people are very apt to do. I want you to see the important principles which are involved in this, and how really the Lord has cause, as He must have, to say of Nicolaitanism, "which I also hate." And my aim and object to-night is to try to make you hate it as God hates it.

I am not speaking of people—God forbid. I am speaking of a thing. Our unhappiness is, that we are at the end of a long series of departures from God, and as a consequence we grow up in the midst of many things which come down to us as "tradition of the elders," associated with names which we all revere and love, upon whose authority in reality we have accepted them, without ever having looked at them really in the light of God's presence. And there are many thus whom we gladly recognize as truly men of God, and servants of God, in a false position. It is of that position I am speaking. I am speaking of a *thing*, as the Lord does—"which thing I hate." He does not say, "which people I hate." Although in those days evil of this kind was not an inheritance as now, and the first propagators of it had, of course, a responsibility peculiarly their own, self-deceived as they may have been; still, in this matter as in all others, we need not be ashamed or afraid to be where the Lord is. Nay, we cannot be with Him in this unless we are. And He says of Nicolaitanism, "which thing I hate."

Because, what does it mean? I will tell you in brief what the very idea of a clergy is. It means a spiritual caste, or class; a set of people having *officially* a right to

leadership in spiritual things; a nearness to God derived from official place, not spiritual power: in fact, the revival, under the names and with various modifications, of that very intermediate priesthood which distinguished Judaism, and which Christianity emphatically disclaims. That is what a clergy means; and in contradiction to these the rest of Christians are but the laity, the seculars, necessarily put back into more or less of the old distance, which the cross of Christ has done away.

We see then why it needed that the Church should be Judaized before the deeds of the Nicolaitans could ripen into a "doctrine." The Lord even had authorized obedience to scribes and Pharisees sitting in Moses' seat; and to make this text apply as people apply it now, *Moses' seat* had, of course, to be set up in the Christian Church: this done, and the mass of Christians degraded from the priesthood Peter spoke of into mere "lay members," the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was at once established.

Understand me fully that I am in no wise questioning the divine institution of the Christian ministry. God forbid; for ministry, in the fullest sense, is characteristic of Christianity, as I have already in fact maintained. Nor do I (while believing that all true Christians are ministers also by the very fact) deny a special and distinctive ministry of the Word, as what God has given to some, and not to all, though for the use of all. No one truly taught of God can deny that some, not all, among Christians have the place of evangelist, pastor, teacher. I believe I make more of this than current views do; for I believe that every true minister is a gift from Christ, in His care as Head of the Church, for His people, and one who has his place from God alone and is responsible in that character to God, and God alone. The miserable system which I see around degrades him from this blessed place, and makes him in fact little more than the manufacture and

the servant of men. While giving, it is true, a place of lordship over people which gratifies a carnal mind, still it fetters the spiritual man, and puts him in chains, everywhere giving him an artificial conscience towards man, hindering in fact his conscience being properly before God.

Let me briefly state to you what the Scripture doctrine of the ministry is; it is a very simple one. The Assembly of God is Christ's body; all the members are members of Christ. There is no other membership in Scripture than this, the membership of Christ's body, to which all true Christians belong: not many bodies of Christ, but one body; not many churches, but one Church.

There is, of course a different place for each member of the body, by the very fact that he is such. All members have not the same office: there is the eye, the ear, and so on, but they are all necessary, and all necessarily ministering in some way to one another.

Every member has its place, not merely locally and for the benefit of certain other members, but for the benefit of the whole body.

Each member has its *gift*, as the apostle teaches distinctly. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. *Having then gifts differing* according to the grace that is given to us," etc. (Rom. xii. 4-6).

In the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians the apostle speaks at large of these gifts; and he calls them by a significant name—"manifestations of the Spirit." They are gifts of the Spirit, of course; but more, they are "manifestations of the Spirit;" they manifest themselves where they are found—where (I scarcely need to add) there is spiritual discernment—where souls are before God.

For instance if you take the gospel of God, whence does it derive its authority and power? From any sanc-

tion of men? any human credentials of any kind? or from its own inherent power? I maintain that the common attempt to authenticate the messenger takes away from, instead of adding to, the power of the Word. God's word must be received as such: he that receives it sets to his seal that *God is true*. Its ability to meet the needs of heart and conscience is derived from the fact that it is "God's good news," who knows perfectly what man's need is, and has provided for it accordingly. He who has felt its power knows well from whom it comes. The work and witness of the Spirit of God in the soul need no witness of man to supplement them.

Even the Lord's appeal in His own case was to the truth He uttered: "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" When He stood forth in the Jewish synagogues, or elsewhere, He was but, in men's eyes, a poor carpenter's son, accredited by no school or set of men at all. All the weight of authority was ever against Him. He disclaimed even "receiving testimony from men" God's word alone should speak for God. "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." And how did it approve itself? By the fact of its being truth. "If I speak the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" It was the truth that was to make its way with the true. "He that wills to do God's will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself." He says: I speak the truth; I bring it to you from God; and if it is truth, if you are seeking to do God's will, you will learn to recognize it as the truth. God will not leave people in ignorance and darkness if they are seeking to be doers of His will. Can you suppose that God will allow true hearts to be deceived by whatever plausible deceptions may be abroad? He is able to make His voice known in those who seek to hear His voice. And so the Lord says to Pilate, "Every one that is *of the truth* heareth My voice" (John xviii. 37). "My sheep hear My voice, and

I know them and they follow Me;" and again, "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers" (John x. 27, 5).

Such is the nature of truth then, that to pretend to authenticate it to those who are themselves true, is to dishonor it, as if it were not capable of self-evidence; and it dishonors God, as if *He* could be wanting to souls, or to what He Himself has given. Nay, the apostle says: "By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. iv. 2). And the Lord speaks of its being the condemnation of the world that "light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John iii. 19). There was no lack of evidence: light was there, and men owned its power to their own condemnation when they sought to escape from it.

Even so in the gift, there was "the manifestation of the Spirit," and it was "given to every man to profit withal." By the very fact that he had it he was responsible to use it—responsible to Him who had not given it in vain. In the gift itself lay the ability to minister, and title too; for I am bound to help and serve with what I have. And if souls are helped, they need scarcely ask if I had commission to do it.

That is the simple character of ministry—the service of love, according to the ability which God gave; mutual service of each to each, and each to all, without jostling or exclusion of one another. Each gift was thrown into the common treasury, and all were the richer by it. God's blessing and the manifestation of the Spirit were all the needed sanction. All were not teachers, still less public teachers, of the Word; still, in these cases the same principles exactly applied. That was but one department of a service which had many, and which was rendered by each to each according to his sphere.

Was there nothing else than that? Was there no or-

dained class at all then? That is another thing. There were, without doubt, in the primitive Church two classes of officials, regularly appointed,—ordained, if you like. The deacons were those who, having charge of the fund for the poor and other purposes, were chosen by the saints first for this place of trust in their behalf, and then appointed authoritatively by apostles mediately or immediately. Elders were a second class,—elderly men, as the word imports,—who were appointed in the local assemblies as “bishops” or “overseers,” to take cognizance of their state. That the elders were the same as bishops may be seen in Paul’s words to the elders of Ephesus, where he exhorts them to “take heed to . . . all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*.” There they have translated the word, “bishops,” but in Titus they have left it—“That thou shouldest ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee; if any be blameless . . . for a *bishop* must be blameless” (Acts xx. 28; Tit. i. 5, 7).

Their work was to “oversee,” and although for that purpose their being “apt to teach” was a much needed qualification, in view of errors already rife, yet no one could suppose that teaching was confined to those who were “elders,” “husbands of one wife, having their children in subjection with all gravity.” This was a needed test for one who was to be a bishop; “for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim. iii. 1-7).

Whatever gifts they had, they used, as all did, and thus the apostle directs, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, specially they who labor in the word and doctrine” (ver. 17). But they might rule, and rule well, without this.

The meaning of their ordination was just this, that here it was *not* a question of gift, but of authority. It was a question of title to take up and look into, often

difficult and delicate matters, among people, too, very likely in no state to submit to what was merely spiritual. The ministration of gift was another thing, and free, under God, to all.

Thus much, very briefly, as to Scripture doctrine. Our painful duty is now to put in contrast with it the system I am deprecating, according to which a distinct class are devoted formally to spiritual things, and the people—the laity—are in the same ratio excluded from such occupation. This is true Nicolaitanism,—the “subjection of the people.”

Again, I say, not only that ministry of the Word is entirely right, but that there are those who have special gifts and responsibility (though still not exclusive) to minister it. But priesthood is another thing, and a thing sufficiently distinct to be easily recognized where it is claimed or in fact exists. I am, of course, aware that Protestants in general disclaim any priestly powers for their ministers. I have no wish nor thought of disputing their perfect honesty in this disavowal. They mean that they have no thought of the minister having any authoritative power of absolution; and that they do not make the Lord's table an altar, whereon afresh day after day the perfection of Christ's one offering is denied by countless repetitions. They are right in both respects; but it is scarcely the whole matter. If we look more deeply we shall find that much of a priestly character may attach where neither of these have the least place.

Priesthood and ministry may be distinguished in this way. Ministry (in the sense we are now considering) is to *men*; priesthood is to God. The minister brings God's message to the people; he speaks for Him to them. The priest goes to God *for* the people; he speaks, in the reverse way, for them to Him. It is surely easy to distinguish these two attitudes.

“Praise and thanksgiving” are “spiritual sacrifices:”

they are part of our offering as priests. Put a special class into a place where regularly and officially they act thus for the rest, they are at once in the rank of an intermediate priesthood,—mediators with God for those who are not so near.

The Lord's Supper is the most prominent and fullest expression of Christian thankfulness and adoration, publicly and stately. But what Protestant minister does not look upon it as his official right to administer this? What "layman" would not shrink from the profanation of administering it? And this is one of the terrible evils of the system, that the mass of Christian people are thus distinctly secularized. Occupied with worldly things, they cannot be expected to be spiritually what the clergy are. And to this they are given over as it were. They are released from spiritual occupations to which they are not equal, and to which others give themselves.

But this must evidently go much further. "The *priest's* lips should keep knowledge." The laity, who have become that by abdicating their priesthood, how should they retain the knowledge belonging to a priestly class? The unspirituality, to which they have given themselves up, pursues them here. The class whose business it is, become the authorized interpreters of the Word also, for how should the secular man know so well what Scripture means? Thus the clergy become spiritual eyes and ears and mouth for the laity, and are in the fair way of becoming the whole body too.

But it suits people well. Do not mistake me as if I meant that this is all come in as the assumption of a class merely. It is that, no doubt, but never could this miserable and unscriptural distinction of clergy and laity have obtained so rapidly as it did, and so universally, if everywhere it had not been found well adapted to the tastes of those even whom it really displaced and degraded. Not alone in Israel, but in Christendom also,

has it been fulfilled: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule through their means, and *my people love to have it so!*" Alas, they did, and they do. As spiritual decline sets in, the heart that is turning to the world barter readily, Esau-like, its spiritual birth-right for a mess of pottage. It exchanges thankfully its need of caring too much for spiritual things, with those who will accept the responsibility of this. Worldliness is well covered with a layman's cloak. And as the Church at large dropped out of first love, as it did rapidly, the world began to come in through the loosely guarded gates, and it became more and more impossible for the rank and file of Christendom to take the blessed and wonderful place which belonged to Christians. The step taken downwards, instead of being retrieved, only made succeeding steps each one easier; until, in less than 300 years from the beginning, a Jewish priesthood and a ritualistic religion were everywhere installed. Only so much the worse, as the precious things of Christianity left their names at least as spoils to the invader, and the shadow became, for most, the substance itself.

But I must return to look more particularly at one feature in this clerisy. I have noted the confounding of ministry and priesthood; the assumption of an official title in spiritual things, of title to administer the Lord's Supper, and I might have added also, to baptize. For none of these things can Scripture be found at all. But I must dwell a little more on the emphasis that is laid on ordination.

I want you to see a little more what ordination means. In the first place, if you look through the New Testament you will find nothing about ordination to teach or to preach. You find people going about everywhere freely exercising whatever gift they had; the whole Church was scattered abroad from Jerusalem, except the apostles, and they went everywhere preaching (literally,

evangelizing) the Word. The persecution did not ordain them, I suppose. So with Apollos. So with Philip the deacon. There is in fact no trace of anything else.

Timothy received a gift by prophecy, by the laying on of Paul's hands with those of the elders, but that was *gift*, not authorization to use it. So he is bidden to communicate his own knowledge to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also; but there is not a word about ordaining them. The case of elders I have already noticed. That of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch is the most unhappy that can be for the purpose people use it for. For prophets and teachers are made to ordain an apostle, and one who totally disclaims being that, "*of men or by man.*" And there the Holy Ghost—*not* confers power of ordaining any, but says, "Separate *Me* Barnabas and Saul for the work whereto I have called them"—for a special missionary journey, which it is shown afterwards they had fulfilled. See Acts viii. 1, 3; xi. 19-21; xiii. 2-4; xviii. 24-28; 1 Tim. iv. 14; etc.

Now, what means this "ordination"? It means much, you may be sure, or it would not be so zealously contended for as it is. There are, no doubt, two phases of it. In the most extreme, as among Romanists and Ritualists, there is claimed for it in the fullest way that it is the conveyance, not merely of authority, but of spiritual power. They assume, with all the power of apostles, to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands, and also for priesthood in the fullest way. The people of God, as such, are rejected from the priesthood He has given them, and a special class put into their place to mediate for them in a way which sets aside the fruit of Christ's work and ties them to the Church as the channel of all grace. Among Protestants you think, perhaps, I need not dwell on this; but it is done among some of these also, in words which, to a certain class of them, seem strangely to mean nothing, while another class find in

them the abundant sanction of their highest pretensions.

Those, on the other hand, who rightly and consistently reject these unchristian assumptions, do not pretend indeed to confer any gift in ordination, but only to "recognize" the gift which God has given. But then, after all, this recognition is considered necessary before the person can baptize or administer the Lord's Supper—things which really require no peculiar gift at all. And as to the ministry of the Word, God's gift is made to require human sanction, and is "recognized" on behalf of His people by those who are considered to have a discernment which the people, as such, have not. Blind themselves or not, these men are to become "leaders of the blind;" else why need others to be eyes for them, while their own souls are taken out of the place of immediate responsibility to God and made responsible unduly to man? An artificial conscience is manufactured for them, and conditions are constantly imposed to which they have to conform in order to obtain the needful recognition. It is well if they are not under the control of their ordainers as to their path of service also, as they generally are.

In principle this is unfaithfulness to God: for if He has given me gift to use for Him, I am surely unfaithful if I go to any man or body of men to ask their leave to use it. The gift itself carries with it the responsibility of using it, as we have seen. If they say, "But people may make mistakes," I own it thoroughly; but who is to assume my responsibility if I am mistaken? And, again, the mistakes of an ordaining body are infinitely more serious than those of one who merely runs unsent. Their mistakes are consecrated and perpetuated by the ordination they bestow; and the man who, if he stood simply upon his own merits, would soon find his true level, has a character conferred upon him by it which the whole weight of the system must sustain. Mistake or not, he is

none the less one of the clerical body—a minister, if he has nothing really to minister. He must be provided for, if only with some less conspicuous place, where souls, dear to God as any, are put under his care, and must be unfed if he cannot feed them.

Do not accuse me of sarcasm; it is the system I am speaking of which is a sarcasm: a swathing of the body of Christ in bands which hinder the free circulation of the vitalizing blood which should be permeating unrestrictedly the whole of it. Nature itself should rebuke the folly. What enormous inference is deduced from such Scriptural premises as that apostles and apostolic men “ordained elders”! They must prove that they are either, and (granting them that), that the Scripture “elder” might be no elder at all, but a young unmarried man just out of his teens, and on the other hand was evangelist, pastor, teacher—all God’s various gifts rolled into one. This is the minister,—according to the system, indeed, *the* minister,—the all in all to the fifty or five hundred souls who are committed to him as “*his flock*,” with which no other has title to interfere! Surely, surely, the brand of Nicolaitanism is upon the forefront of such a system as this!

Take it at its best, the man, if gifted at all, is scarcely likely to have *every* gift. Suppose he is an evangelist, and souls are happily converted, he is no teacher, and cannot build them up. Or, he is a teacher sent to a place where there are but a few Christians, and the mass of his congregation unconverted men. There are no conversions, and his presence there (*according to the system*)! *keeps away* the evangelist who is needed there. Thank God, He is ever breaking up these barriers, and in some irregular way the need may be supplied. But the supply is schismatical and a confusion: the new wine breaks the poor human bottles.

For all this the system is responsible. The exclusive

ministry of one man, or of a number of men in a congregation has no shred of Scripture to support it; while the ordination, as we have seen, is the attempt to confine all ministry to a certain class, and make it rest on human authorization rather than on divine gift; the people, Christ's sheep, being denied their competency to hear His voice. The inevitable tendency is to fix upon the *man* the attention which should be devoted to the word he brings. The question is, Is he accredited? If he speaks truly is subordinated to the question, Is he ordained? or, perhaps I should say, his orthodoxy is settled already for them by the fact of his ordination.

Paul, an apostle, not of men, nor by man, could not have been received upon this plan. There were apostles before him, and he neither went up to them nor got anything from them. If there were a succession, he was a break in the succession. And what he did he did designedly, to show that his gospel was not after man (Gal. i. 11), and that it might not rest upon the authority of man. Nay, if he himself preached a different gospel from that he had preached (for there was not *another*), yea, or an angel from heaven (where the authority, if that were in question, might seem conclusive), his solemn decision is, "Let him be accursed."

Authority then is nothing, if it be not the authority of the word of God. That is the test—is it according to the Scriptures? If the blind lead the blind, shall they not *both* fall into the ditch? To say, "I could not, of course, know; I trusted another," will not save you from the ditch.

But the unspiritual and unlearned layman, how can he pretend to equal knowledge with the educated and accredited minister, devoted to spiritual things? In point of fact, in general he does not. He yields to the one who should know better, and practically the minister's teaching largely supplants the authority of the word of

God. Not that *certainty* indeed is thus attained. He cannot conceal it from himself that people differ, wise and good and learned and accredited as they may be. But here the devil steps in, and—if God has allowed men's authorities to get into a babel of confusion, as they have—suggests to the unwary soul that the confusion must be the result of the obscurity of Scripture, whereas they have got into it by *disregarding* Scripture.

But this is everywhere! Opinion, not faith; opinion to which you are welcome and have a right, of course; and you must allow others a right to theirs. You may say "I believe" as long as you do not mean by that "I know." To claim "knowledge" is to claim that you are wiser, more learned, better, than whole generations before you, who thought opposite to you.

Need I show you how infidelity thrives upon this? how Satan rejoices when, for the simple and emphatic "Yea" of the divine voice, he succeeds in substituting the Yea and Nay of a host of jarring commentators? Think you, you can fight the Lord's battles with the rush of human opinion instead of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"? Think you, "Thus says John Calvin, or John Wesley," will meet Satan as satisfactorily as "Thus saith the *Lord*"?

Who can deny that such thoughts are abroad, and in no wise confined to papists or ritualists? The tendency, alas, is in the heart of unbelief ever departing from the *living* God, as near to His own to-day as at any time through the centuries His Church has traveled on; as competent to instruct as ever—as ready to fulfil the word, "He that will do His will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." The eyes are of the *heart*, and not the *head*. He has hidden from wise and prudent what He reveals to babes. The school of God is more effectual than all colleges combined, and here layman and cleric are equal: "He that is spiritual discerneth all

things," and he alone. Substitute for spirituality there is none: unspirituality the Spirit of God alone can remedy. Ordination, such as practised, is rather a sanction put upon it—an attempt to manifest what is the manifestation of the Spirit, or not His work at all, and to provide leaders for the blind who, with all their care, they cannot ensure not being blind also.

Before I close, I must say a few words about "succession." An ordination which pretends to be derived from the apostles must needs be (to be consistent) a successional one. Who can confer authority (and in the least and lowest theories of ordination authority is conferred, as to baptize and to administer the Lord's Supper) but one himself authorized for this very purpose? You must therefore have a chain of ordained men, lineally succeeding one another. Apostolic succession is as necessary on the Presbyterian as on the Episcopalian plan. John Wesley, as his warrant for ordaining, fell back upon the essential oneness of bishop and presbyter. Nay, Presbyterians will urge against Episcopalians the ease of maintaining succession in this way. I have nothing to do with this: I only insist that succession is needed.

But then, mark the result. It is a thing apart from spirituality, and from truth even. A Romish priest may have it as well as any; and, indeed, through the gutter of Rome most of that we have around us must necessarily have come down. Impiety and impurity do not in the least invalidate Christ's commission. The teacher of false doctrine may be as well His messenger as the teacher of truth. Nay, the possession of the truth, with gift to minister it and godliness combined, are actually *no part* of the credentials of the true ambassador. He may have all these, and be none. He may want them all, and be truly one nevertheless.

Who can believe such doctrine? Can He who is truth accredit error? the righteous One, unrighteousness? It

is impossible. This ecclesiasticism violates every principle of morality, and hardens the conscience that has to do with it. For why need we be careful for truth, if He is not? And how can He send messengers that He would not have to be believed? His own test of a true witness fails: for "he that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh *His* glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." His own test of credibility fails, for "If I *speake the truth*, why do ye not believe Me?" was His own appeal.

No: to state this principle is to condemn it. He who foresaw and predicted the failure of what should have been the bright and evident witness of His truth and grace, could not ordain a succession of teachers for it who should carry His commission, unforfeitable by whatever failure! Before apostles had left the earth, the house of God had become as a "great house," and it was necessary to separate from vessels to dishonor in it. He who bade His apostle instruct another to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart," could not possibly tell us to listen to men, as His ministers, who are alien from all this, and have His commission in spite of all. And thus, notably, in the second epistle to Timothy, in which this is said, there is no longer, as in the first, any talk of elders, or of ordained men. It is "*faithful* men" who are wanted, *not* for ordination, but for the deposit of the truth committed to Timothy: "The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Thus God's holy Word vindicates itself to the heart and conscience ever. The effort to attach His sanction to a Romish priesthood, or a Protestant hierarchy, fails alike upon the same ground; for as to this they are upon the same ground. Alas, Nicolaitanism is no past thing, no obscure doctrine of past ages, but a widespread and

gigantic system of error, fruitful in evil results. Error is long-lived, though mortal. Reverence it not for its gray hairs, and "follow not with a multitude to do evil." With cause does the Lord say in this case, "which thing I hate." If He does, shall we be afraid to have fellowship with Him? That there are good men entangled in it, all must admit. There are godly men and true ministers ignorantly wearing the livery of men. May God deliver them; may they cast aside their fetters and be free! May they rise up to the true dignity of their calling, responsible to God, and walking before Him alone!

On the other hand, beloved brethen, it is of immense importance that all His people, however diverse their places in the body of Christ may be, should realize that they are *all* as really ministers as they are all priests. We need to recognize that every Christian has spiritual duties flowing from spiritual relationship to every other Christian. It is the privilege of each one to contribute his share to the common treasury of gift with which Christ has endowed His Church. Nay, he who does not contribute is actually holding back what is his debt to the whole family of God. No possessor of one talent is entitled to wrap it in a napkin upon that account: it would be mere unfaithfulness and unbelief.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Brethren in Christ, when shall we awake to the reality of our Lord's words there? Ours is a never-failing spring of perpetual joy and blessing, which if we but come to when we thirst, out of our bellies shall flow rivers of living water. The spring is not limited by the vessel which receives it: it is divine, and yet ours fully—fully as can be! Oh, to know more this abundance, and the responsibility of the possession of it, in a dry and weary scene like this! Oh, to know better the infinite grace which has taken us up as channels of its outflow among men! When shall we rise up to the sense of our common dig-

nity? to the sweet reality of fellowship with Him who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister?" Oh for *unofficial* ministry, the overflowing of full hearts into empty ones, so many as there are around us! How we should rejoice, in a scene of want and misery and sin, to find perpetual opportunity to show the competency of Christ's fulness to meet and minister to every form of it!

Official ministry is practical independence of the Spirit of God. It is to decide that such a vessel shall overflow, though at the time, it may be, practically empty; and, on the other hand, that such another shall *not* overflow, however full it may be. It proposes, in the face of Him who has come down in Christ's absence to be the Guardian of His people, to provide for order and for edification, not by spiritual power, but by legislation. It would provide for failure on the part of Christ's sheep to hear *His* voice, by making it, as far as possible, unnecessary for them to do so. It thus sanctions and perpetuates unspirituality, instead of condemning or avoiding it.

It is quite true that in God's mode of action the failure in man's part may become more evident externally: for He cares little for a correct outside when the heart is nevertheless not right with Him, and He knows well that ability to maintain a correct outside may in fact prevent a truthful judgment of what is our real condition before Him. Men would have upbraided Peter with his attempt to walk upon those waves which made his little faith so manifest. The Lord would only rebuke the *littleness* of the faith which made him fail. And man still, and ever, would propose the boat as the remedy for failure, instead of the strength of the Lord's support which He made Peter prove. Yet, after all, the boat confessedly may fail; winds and waves may overthrow it; but "the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea." Through these many centuries of failure have we proved Him untrustworthy?

Beloved, is it your honest conviction that it is absolutely safe to trust the living God? Then let us make no provision for *His* failure, however much we may have to own that *we* have failed! Let us act as if we really trusted Him.



LECTURE III

 ESTABLISHMENTS, AND A MONEY BASIS
 (Rev. ii. 12-17)

WE have seen, beloved friends, two main steps in the Church's outward decline, after the loss of first love had made any departure possible. First of all, the divine idea of the Church was lost. Instead of its being a body of people having, in the full and proper sense, eternal life and salvation, children of God, members of Christ, and called out of the world, as not belonging to it, it became a mere "gathering together" of people, for whom indeed the old names might in part remain, but who were in fact the world itself, with true Christian people scattered through it. Children of God they might be reckoned by baptism, and by it have forgiveness of sins also, but that was no settlement for eternity at all. They were confessedly under trial, and uncertain as to how things would finally turn out—a ground which all the world could understand and appreciate, with sacraments and means of grace to help them on, and prevent them realizing the awfulness of their position.

Of course, this immense change from Church to Synagogue was not at once effected. Yet the Church historically known to us, outside of the New Testament, is but in fact essentially the Synagogue. The fire of persecution helped to prevent for a while the extreme result, and to separate mere professors from the confessors of Christ. Still through it all the leaven of Judaism wrought its deadly work; and no sooner was persecution stopped than the world's overtures for peace and alliance were eagerly

listened to; and with Constantine, for many, the millennium seemed to have arrived. Could the Church of the apostles have fallen into the world's arms so? Their voice would have rebuked the thought as of Satan, as indeed it was: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?"

The second step we saw in the rise of a clergy, a spiritual or priestly class, replacing the true Christian ministry, the free exercise of the various gifts which resulted from the various places of the membership of the body of Christ. The clerical assumption displaced the body of Christian people—now a true "laity"—as at least less spiritual and near to God; a place, alas, easily accepted where Christ had lost what the world had gained in value with His own. As Judaism prevailed, and the world came in through the ever-opening door, the distance between the two classes increased, and more and more the clergy became the channels of all blessing to the rest. Practically, and in the end almost openly, they became the Church; and the Church became, from a company of those already saved, a channel for conveying a sacramental and hypothetical salvation.

We come now to look at the issue of all this, when circumstances favored. In Pergamos (where the Lord presents Himself no longer in the tender and gracious sympathy He manifests for His suffering ones in Smyrna, but as having the sharp sword with two edges—His Word to judge the state of things among them)—in Pergamos, the characteristic thing is, they are "dwelling where Satan's throne is." "Throne," not "seat," is confessedly the word used. The translators apparently shrank from the use of the stronger word: for, according to current belief, Satan reigns in hell, not on earth; that is, in the prison in which God has put him, but from which he has strangely broken loose. Milton's picture is the popular one, and with it, no doubt, you are familiar.

But it is as unscriptural as it is unreasonable. What would be thought of a government which allowed a chief malefactor to reign in his prison over his fellow-culprits, and to break prison and roam freely where he would? God's government is not chargeable with this. In hell Satan will be the lowest and most miserable there; and when committed to it there will be no escape permitted. But that will not be until after the millennium, as Rev. xx. assures us.

This idea, however, permits people to escape from the appalling thought that Satan is now the "prince of this world," and the "god of this world" (or age), which Scripture plainly declares him to be. It is over the world he exercises authority, and this gives to the "world" and "dwelling in the world" an exceedingly solemn character. For, "dwelling in the world" is quite another thing, of course, from *being* in it. We are in the world perforce, and in no wise responsible for that; but to be a dweller in it is a moral state; it is to be a citizen in it—the condition which the apostle speaks of in Philippians as obtaining among professing Christians: "For many walk of whom I have told you before, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For *our conversation* (or citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (iii. 18-20).

Their characteristic is, that they are enemies, not of Christ personally, but of the *Cross*, that Cross by which we are "crucified to the world, and the world to us." Their hearts were on earthly things, which, not satisfying them, as earthly things *cannot*, made their god to be their belly;—that inward craving became their master, and made them drudges in its service.

The Christian's citizenship is "in heaven." That forms his character, and delivers him from the unsatisfying pur-

suit of earthly things. But little, indeed, is this understood now. Even where people can talk and sing of the world being a wilderness, you will find that in general their idea of it is a place of sorrow and trial, to which all—the world and the Christian alike—are exposed. Pilgrimage, in their minds, is a thing perforce. The world passes away, and they cannot keep it; but, if honest, they would own that they would keep it if they could. As they cannot, they are glad enough to think there is such a place as heaven at the end of it; in the meanwhile they go on trying (honestly, no doubt, if you can call such a thing honest in a Christian) to get as much of it as they can—or, at least, as much as will make them comfortable in it.

It is a different thing to be a pilgrim really—a man journeying on earth with an absorbing purpose to reach a fixed point beyond: not one whom the world is leaving, but one who is leaving it. By the very fact that the stream of time is carrying us all down with it, if that constituted a pilgrim it would make all the world pilgrims; and so, in fact, people do talk of the “pilgrimage of life:” but this is the abuse of a term, and not its use. We can be pilgrims in that sense, and find all the world companions; and such, indeed, had got to be the idea of pilgrimage in the Pergamos state of the Church. They talked of it, no doubt, and built their houses the more solidly to stand the rough weather: if they owned there were “rainy days” ahead, it was the more their duty to lay by for a rainy day. *God said* they were dwelling where Satan’s throne was.

The history of old Babel was repeating itself. You may find the vivid type of it in Gen. xi., where men “journeyed” indeed, but not as pilgrims, or as only that till they could find some smooth place in which to settle down. “They journeyed” as colonists or immigrants on the lookout for land, from the rough hills where human

life beyond the flood began; "from the east" (that is, with their backs toward the blessed dawn), and "they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they *dwelt* there."

That was, alas, the Church's progress: from the rough heights of martyrdom down to the smooth level where were no difficulties to deter the most timid souls. There the Church multiplied, and there they began to build "a city and a tower whose top should reach to heaven:" but the city was not Jerusalem, but Jerusalem's old enemy; not the "possession of peace," but the city of "confusion"—Babel.

Yet it prospered. They built well. True, they were away from the quarries of the hills, and could not build with the stone they had there been used to. They did the best thing they could with the clay which was native in the soil of that lower land. "They had bricks for stone, and slime for mortar." We have seen some of this work already. It looks well, and lasts, in the fine climate of those regions, quite a long time—human material, not divine—"bricks," man's manufacture, "for stones," God's material. They cannot build great Babylon with the "living stones" of God's producing. Men-made Christians, compacted together, not by the cementing Spirit, but by the human motives and influences whereby the masses are affected, but which the fire of God will one day try—so is great Babylon built.

Now it is remarkable that the word Pergamos has a double significance. In the plural form it is used for the citadel of a town, while it is at least near akin to *Purgos*, "a town." Again, divide it into the two words in which it naturally separates, and you have "*per*" (although) a particle which "usually serves to call attention to something which is objected to" (Liddell and Scott), and "*gamos*" (marriage). It was indeed by the mar-

riage of Church and world that the "city and tower" of Babylon the Great was raised. And such are the times we are now to contemplate.

They were the times of the great Constantine—the time of what is significantly called the "*establishment* of the Church;" but not, alas, its establishment upon its Rock-foundation, where the gates of hades could not prevail against it, but its establishment in the world's favor, and under its protection. It was the success of Satan, the triumph of his plan by which the Church became the synagogue; but not now God's, but in opposition to God.

As a consequence, you find not only Nicolaitanism now fully accepted, but the "doctrine of Balaam" also. They were still what is called *orthodox*. "Thou holdest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." They maintained, in general, the truth of Christ as against Arianism, which denied His proper deity. It was the period of the creeds—of Nicene orthodoxy. But it was an orthodoxy which, while maintaining (thank God for it) the doctrine of the Trinity, could be, and was, very far astray as to the application of Christ's blessed work to the salvation of man—orthodox as to Christ, most *unorthodox* as to the gospel.

Where, in the Apostles' Creed (so-called), do you find the gospel? "The forgiveness of sins" is an article of belief, no doubt; but how and when? In the Nicene Creed there is, "I acknowledge one *baptism* for the remission of sins," and entire silence as to any other. In the Athanasian it is owned that Christ "suffered for our salvation," but how we are to obtain the salvation is again omitted. Practically, the belief of the times was in the efficacy of baptism, and so painful and uncertain was the way of forgiveness for sins committed afterwards, that

multitudes deferred baptism to a dying bed, that the sins of a lifetime might be washed away together.

The Lord goes on to say: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

Balaam, the *destroyer* of the people, is a new graft upon Nicolaitanism—a prophet in outward nearness to the Lord, while his heart went after his own covetousness;—a man having no personal grudge against the people, but whose god was his belly, and who would curse them if his god bade;—one whose doctrine was to seduce Israel from their separateness, into guilty mixture with the nations and their idolatry around. The type is easily read, and the examples of it distressingly numerous. When the Church and the world became on good terms with one another, and the Church had the things of the world wherewith to attract the natural heart, the hireling prophet was a matter of course, who for his own ends would seek still further to destroy all godly separateness.

How glad one would be, to be able to think that a thing of the past! But it is one step only in a persistent departure from God on the part of the professing Church at large, never retracted or repented of. Nor, solemn to say, however much individuals may be delivered, is such decline ever recovered from by the body as such. Every step downwards only accelerates the progress down. In the wilderness Israel took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of their god Remphan, and the Lord's word appended is, "I will carry you away beyond Babylon." There were many reformations afterwards, more or less partial, but no fresh start. So with the Church. People talk about a second Pentecost. There never really was. The true Pentecostal times lasted for how brief a moment!

It is a sad and terrible thing to speak of evil, and we

have indeed ever to watch ourselves, lest in fact we should be rejoicing in that which we affect to judge. But if the Lord has pronounced it, woe will it be to us if we are not with Him in His judgment. It would be unfaithfulness and dishonesty, as well as real breach of charity, not to say what the Lord says. To modify or alter it would be dishonest. "He that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully," He Himself says.

From Constantine's day to the present, Pergamos has characterized the state of things. World and Church have been one in Christendom at large; and wherever this is found, there in truth is Babylon, although Rome may be head of Babylon, as indeed she is.

Let us look about us with the lamp the Lord has given us, and see whereabouts we are with regard to these things. How far are we individually keeping the Church and the world separate? How far are we really refusing that yoke with unbelievers which the passage in 2 Cor. vi. so emphatically condemns? Our *associations* are judged of God as surely as any other part of our practical conduct; and "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" is His word. He cannot, He declares, be to us a Father as He would except we come out and be separate. Solemn, solemn words in the midst of the multiplicity of such confederacies in the present day! Can we bear to be ourselves searched out by them, beloved brethren? Oh, if we value our true place as sons with God, shall we not be only glad to see things as they are?

Now, this forbidden yoke has various applications. It applies to anything in which we voluntarily unite with others to attain a common object. Among social relations, marriage is such a yoke; in business relations, partnerships, and such like; and in the foremost rank of all would come ecclesiastical associations.

To take these latter now: there are certain systems which, as we have already seen, mix up the Church and

the world in the most thorough way possible. All forms of ritualism do—forms wherein a person is made by baptism “a member of Christ and a child of God.” Where that is asserted, separation is impossible, for no amount of charity, and no extravagance of theological fiction, can make the mass of these baptized people other than the world.

All national churches in the same way mix them up by the very fact that they are national churches. You cannot by the force of will, or act of Parliament, make a nation Christian. You can give them a name to live, while they are dead. You can make them formalists and hypocrites, but nothing more. You can do your best to hide from them their true condition, and leave them under an awful delusion from which eternity alone may wake them up.

All systems Jewish in character mix them up of necessity. Where all are probationers together it is not possible to do otherwise. All systems in which the Church is made a means of salvation, instead of the company of the saved, necessarily do so. When people join churches in order to be saved, as is the terrible fashion of the day, these churches become, of course, the common receptacle of sinners and saints alike. And wherever assurance of salvation is not maintained, the same thing must needs result.

Systems such as these naturally acquire adherents, and rapidly; money and worldly influence prevail, and among such the doctrine of Balaam does its deadly work. The world, not even disguised in the garb of Christianity, is sought for the sake of material support. Men that have not given themselves to the Lord are taught that they can give their money. It is openly proclaimed that God is not sufficient as His people's portion; His cause requires help, and that so much that He will accept it from

the hands of His very enemies. There is an idolatry of means abroad. Money will help the destitute; money will aid to circulate the Scriptures; money will send missionaries to foreign parts; money will supply a hundred wants and get over a host of difficulties. We are going to put it to so good a use we must not be over-scrupulous as to the mode of getting it. The church has to be maintained, the minister to be paid. They do not like the principle that "the end sanctifies the means," but still, what are they to do? God is sufficient, of course, in theory, but they must use the means, and this century no longer expects miracles.

But why go over the dreary round of such godless and faithless arguments? Is it a wonder that infidelity bursts out into a triumphant laugh as Christians maintain the impotence of their God, and violate His precepts to save His cause from ruin? Nay, do you not in fact proclaim it ruined, irredeemably ruined, when His ear is already too dull to hear, and His arm shortened that it cannot save? Money will build churches, will buy Bibles, will support ministers—true. Will it buy a new Pentecost? or bring in the Millennium? Will you bribe the blessed Spirit to work for you thus? or make sheer will and animal energy do without Him? Alas, you pray for power, and dishonor Him who is the only source of power!

But what is the result of this solicitation of the world? Can you go to it with the Bibles you have bought with its own money, and tell it the truth as to its own condition? Can you tell them that "the whole world lieth in wickedness?" that "all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world?" Can you maintain the separate place that God has given you, and the sharp edge of the truth that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God?" Of course you cannot. They will turn round upon you and say: Why then do you

come to us for our money? You ask us to give, and tell us our giving will not please Him! It is not reasonable, we do not believe it, and you cannot believe it yourselves!

No: the world does not believe in giving anything for nothing. Whatever the word of God may say, whatever you may think of it in your heart, you must compromise in some way. You must not maintain the rigid line of separation. Balaam must be your prophet. You must mix with the world, and let it mix with you: how else will you do it good? You must cushion your church seats and invite it in. You must make your building and your services attractive; you must not frighten people away, but allure them in. You must be all things to all men; and as you cannot expect to get them up to your standard, you must get down to theirs.

Do I speak too strongly? Oh, words can hardly exaggerate the state of things that may be everywhere found, not in some far-off land, but here all around us, in the present day. I should not dare to tell you what deeds are done in the name of Christ by His professing people. They will hire singers to sing His praises for admiration, and to draw a crowd. They will provide worldly entertainments, and sit down and be entertained in company. And, as more and more they sink down to the world's level, they persuade themselves the world is rising up to theirs; while God is saying, as of His people of old, "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all this" (Hos. vii. 8-10).

It is a downward course, and being trod at an ever increasing pace. Competition is aroused, and it is who

can be the most successful candidate for the world's favors. The example of one emboldens another. Emulation, envy, ambition, and a host of unholy motives, are aroused, and Scripture, the honor of Christ, the jealous eyes of a holy, holy God—ah, you are antiquated and Pharisaic if you talk of these!

There is one feature in this melancholy picture I cannot pass by briefly thus. *The ministry*, or what stands before men's eyes as such, how is it affected by all this? I have already said that Scripture does not recognize the thought of a minister and his people. Upon this I do not intend to dwell again. But what, after all, in the present day, has got to be the strength of the tie between a church and its ministry? Who that looks around can question that money has here a controlling influence? The seal of the compact is the salary. A rich church with an ample purse, can it not make reasonably sure of attracting the man it wants? The poor church, however rich in piety, is it not conscious of its deficiency? People naturally do not like to own it. The ministers persuade themselves, successfully enough, no doubt, that it is a wider and more promising field of labor that attracts them. But the world notoriously does not believe this; and it has but too good reason for its unbelief.

The contract is ordinarily for so much money. If the money is not forthcoming, the contract is dissolved. But more: the money consideration decides in another way the character of man they wish to secure. It is ordinarily a *successful* man that is wanted, after the fashionable idea of what is success. They want a man who will fill the church, perhaps help to pay off the debt upon it. Very likely the payment of his own salary depends upon this. He will not be likely most to please who is not influenced by such motives: and thus it will be only God's mercy if Balaam's doctrine does not secure a Balaam to carry it out. But even if a godly man is obtained, he is put

under the influence of the strongest personal temptation to soften down the truth, which, if fully preached, may deprive him of not only influence, but perhaps even subsistence.

Will the most godly man be the most popular man? No: for godliness is not what the world seeks. It can appreciate genius, no doubt, and eloquence, and amiability, and benevolence, and utilitarianism; but godliness is something different from the union of even all of these. If the world can appreciate godliness, I will own indeed it is no longer the world. But as long as the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, still characterize it, it is not of the Father, nor the Father of it. And why, in that passage, does the apostle say "*the Father?*" Is it not because, in thinking of the Father's relation to the world, we must needs think of the *Son?* As he says again, in another place, "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the *Son of God?*" And why? Because it is the Son of God the world has crucified and cast out; and that Cross which was the world's judgment of the Son of God, is for faith *God's* judgment of the world.

Was Christ popular, beloved friends? Could He, with divine power in His hands, and ministering it freely for the manifold need appealing to Him on every side—*could He* commend Himself to men, His creatures? No, assuredly. But you think, perhaps, those peculiarly evil times. They understand Him better now, you think. Take, then, His dear name with you to men's places of business and to their homes to-day, to the workshop and the counting-houses and the public places. Do you doubt what response you would get?

"In the churches?" Oh yes; they have agreed to tolerate Him there. The churches have been carefully arranged to please the world. Comfortable, fashionable, the poor packed in convenient corners, eye and ear and

intellect provided for: that is a different thing. And then it helps to quiet conscience when it will sometimes stir. But oh, is there much sign of His presence whose authenticating sign was, "*To the poor the gospel is preached?*"

Enough of this, however. It will be of no profit to pursue it further. But to those with whom the love of Christ is more than a profession, and the honor of Christ a reality to be maintained, I would solemnly put it how they can go on with what systematically tramples His honor under foot, yea, under the world's foot—falsifies His gospel, and helps to deceive to their own destruction the souls for whom He died? The doctrine of Balaam is everywhere: its end is judgment upon the world, and judgment too upon the people of God. If ministers cannot be supported, if churches cannot be kept up without this, the honestest, manliest, only Christian course is, let the thing go down! If Christians cannot get on without the world, they will find at least that the world can get on without them. They cannot persuade it that disobedience is such a serious thing when they see the light-hearted, flippant disobedience of which it is so easy to convict the great mass of professors, while it is so utterly impossible to deter them from it. "Money" is the cry; "well, but we want the money." Aye, though Christ's honor is betrayed by it, and infidels sneer, and souls perish! Brethren, the very Pharisees of old were wiser! "*We may not put it into the treasury,*" they whispered, "*because it is the price of blood.*"

It will be a relief to turn to Scripture, and to examine what we have there upon this subject. It is very simple. There was no organized machinery for supporting churches; none for paying ministers; no promise, no contract upon the people's part, as to any sum they were to receive at all. There were necessities of course, many, to be provided for, and it was understood that there was to be provision. The saints themselves had to meet all.

They had not taken up with a cheap religion. Having often to lay down their lives for it, they did not think much of their goods. The principle was this: "Every man as he is disposed in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." It was to be to God, and before God. There was to be no blazoning it out to brethren, still less before the world. He that gave was not to let his left hand know what his right hand was doing.

It is true there were solemn motives to enforce it. On the one side, "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." But on the other side—most powerful, most influential of all—was this: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich."

Such was the principle; such was to be the motive. There was no compulsory method of extraction, if this failed. If there was not heart to give, it was no use to extract.

So as to the laborer in the Word, it was very clearly announced, and that as what God had ordained, that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel," and that "the laborer is worthy of his hire." But although here also God used the willing hands of His people, it was not understood that *they* "hired" him, or that he was *their* laborer. What they gave, it was to God they gave it, and *his* privilege it was to be Christ's servant. His responsibility was to the Lord, and theirs also. They did not understand that they were to get so much work for so much money. They did not *pay*, but "*offer-ed*." There is a wonderful difference: for you cannot "pay" God, and you do not "offer" (in this sense of offering) to man. The moment you *pay*, God is out of the question.

Do you think this is perhaps a little unfair on both sides? that it is right that there should be something more of an equivalent for the labor he bestows—for the money you give? That is good law, bad gospel. What better than simony is it to suppose, after this fashion, “that the gift of God can be purchased with money?” Would you rather make your own bargain than trust Christ’s grace to minister to your need? Or is it hard for him that he who ministers the Word should show his practical trust in the Word by looking to the Lord for his support? Ah, to whom could he look so well? and how much better off would he be for losing the sweet experience of His care?

No: it is all unbelief in divine power and love, and machinery brought in to make up for the want of it. And yet, if there is not this, what profit is there of keeping up the empty profession of it? If God can fail, let the whole thing go together; if *He* cannot, then your skilful contrivances are only the exhibition of rank unbelief.

And what do you accomplish by it? You bring in the Canaanite (the merchantman) into the house of the Lord. You offer a premium to the trader in divine things—the man who most values your money, and least cares for your souls. You cannot but be aware how naturally those two extremes associate together, and you cannot but own that if you took the Lord’s plan, and left His laborers to look to Him for their support, you would do more to weed out such traffickers than by all your care and labor otherwise. Stop the hire, and you will banish the hirelings, and the blessed ministry of Christ will be freed from an incubus and a reproach which your contracts and bargainings are largely responsible for. And if Christ’s servants cannot after all trust Him, let them seek out some honest occupation where they may gain their bread without scandal. In the fifteenth century before Christ, God brought a whole nation out of

Egypt, and maintained them forty years in the wilderness. Did He, or did He not? Is He as competent as ever? Alas! will you dare to say those were the days of His youth, and these of His decrepitude?

So serious are these questions. But the unbelief that exists now existed then. Do you remember what the people did when they had lost Moses on the mount awhile, and lacked a leader? *They made a god of the gold which they had brought out of Egypt with them, and fell down and worshiped the work of their own hands.* History repeats itself. Who can deny that we have been looking on the counterpart of that?

It may be well to ask here, Is there any measure of the Christian's giving, for one who would be right with God about it?

The notion of the tithe, or tenth, has been revived, or with some two tithes, as that which was the measure of one Israelite's giving. Jacob has been propounded to us as an example, as he stood before God in the morning after that wonderful night at Bethel, when God had engaged to be with him and to be his God, and to multiply his seed, and bring him again into the land from which he was departing. "If God will be with me," he says, "and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

God's ways are so little like our ways, His thoughts so little like our thoughts, it is not very wonderful man does not understand them. But, surely, Jacob does not here enter into the blessedness of God's thoughts. I need not dwell now upon his case, but only notice it to say that for a Christian at least the whole principle is a mistake. You are not to ransom nine-tenths from God

by giving one. You are bought with a price, you and yours. In a double way, by creation and redemption too, you belong, with all you have, to God. Many people are acting upon the perfectly wrong idea that whether as to time, money, or whatever else, God is to have His share, and the rest is their own. They misunderstand the legal types, and do not realize the immense difference that accomplished redemption has brought in with it.

Before "Ye are bought with a price" could yet be said, it was impossible to deduce the consequences that result from this. Grace goes beyond law, which made nothing, and could make nothing, perfect. The very essence of the surrender of the life to God is that it must be a voluntary one. Like the vow of the Nazarite, (which was a vow of separation to the Lord, and which reads, "when any one *will* vow the vow of a Nazarite,") that surrender must be of the heart, or it is none. Nor is it a contradiction to this that there were *born* Nazarites—Nazarites from the womb, as Samson and the Baptist. Christians are all *born* (new-born) to Nazariteship, which is implied, and necessitated, in a true sense, by the life which we receive from God. But the necessity is not one externally impressed upon it: it is an internal one. "A new heart will I give you," says the Lord: but the new heart given is a heart which chooses freely the service of its Master. A legal requirement of the whole would have been unavailing, and a mere bondage. "Not grudgingly, or of necessity," is, as we have seen, the Scripture rule for the Christian. But that does not at all mean what people characterize as "cheap religion." It does not mean that God will accept the "mites" of the niggard, as the Lord did those of the woman in the Gospels. Christ does *not* say, "Give as much or as little as you please: it is all one." No: He expects intelligent, free surrender of all to Him, as on the part of one who recognizes that all is really His.

If you will look at the sixteenth chapter of Luke, you will find the Lord announcing very distinctly this principle. The unjust steward is our picture there—the picture of those who are (as we all are as to the old creation) under sentence of dismissal from the place they were originally put in, on account of unrighteous dealing in it. Grace has not recalled the sentence, “Thou mayest be no longer steward.” It has given us far more, but it has not reinstated us in the place we have thus lost. Death, in fact, is our removal from our stewardship, although it be the entrance for us as Christians into something which must be confessed “far better.” But grace has delayed the execution of the sentence, and meanwhile our Master’s goods are in our hand. All that we have here are *His* things, and not ours. And now God looks for us to be faithful in what is, alas, to men as such (creature of God, as indeed it is) “the mammon of unrighteousness”—the miserable deity of unrighteous man.

Moreover, grace counts this faithfulness to us. We are permitted to “make *friends* of this mammon of unrighteousness” by our godly use of it; whereas it is naturally, through our fault, our enemy and our accuser. It must not be imagined that the “unjust steward” is to be our character literally all through. The Lord shows us that this is not so when He speaks of “faithfulness” being looked for. No doubt the unjust steward in the parable acts unjustly with his master’s goods, and it must not be imagined that *God* commends him—it is “his lord” that does so—man as man admiring the shrewdness which he displayed. Yet only so could be imaged that conduct which in us is *not* injustice, but faithfulness to our Master—grace entitling us to use what we have received, for our own true and eternal interests, which in this case are one with His own due and glory.

But then there are things also which we may speak of as “our own.” What are these? Ah, they are what **the**

Lord speaks of as, after all, "the true riches." "If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's,—not "another *man's*," but God's, of course,—"who will give you that which is *your own*?"

Thus our own things are distinct altogether; and I need not tell Christians what they are. I need only remind you that if you have in your thoughts, as men down here, a quantity of things as your own possessions, to be liberal with, or to hoard up—in both cases you misapprehend the matter. As to things here, you have your *Master's* goods, which, if you hoard up here, you surely lose hereafter, and turn them into accusers. On the other hand, you are graciously permitted to transfer them really to your own account, by laying them up amid your treasure, where your treasure is—"in heaven."

The rich man, in the solemn illustration at the end of the chapter, was one who had made his lord's "good things" his own after another fashion; and in eternity they were not friends, but enemies and accusers. "Son," says Abraham to him, "remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things;"—that was all. But what a solemn memory it was! How once again the purple and fine linen and sumptuous fare met the eyes they had once gratified, and now appalled. Lazarus had been at his gate, but it was not Lazarus that accused. And oh, beware of having things your own down here. There was a man who had his "good things" here, and in eternity what were they to him?

I know this is not the gospel. No, but it is what, as the principle of God's holy government, the gospel should prepare us to understand and to enter into. Have you observed that the most beautiful and affecting story of gospel-grace, the story of the lost son received, is what *precedes* the story of the unjust steward? The Pharisees,

who in the fifteenth chapter stand for the picture of the elder son, are here rebuked in the person of the rich man. Will not the prodigal received back to a Father's arms be the very one who will understand that he owes his all to a Father's love? Is not "ye are bought with a price" the gospel? But then ye are *bought*: ye are not your own.

Put it in another way. You remember that when God would bring His people out of Egypt, Pharaoh wanted to compromise—of course by that compromise to keep the people as his slaves. Three separate offers he makes to Moses, each of which would have prevented salvation being, according to God's thought of it, salvation at all. The first compromise was "worship *in the land*."

"And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land."

And still the world asks why need you go outside it? You are entitled to your opinions, but why be so extreme? Why three days' journey into the wilderness? Why separate from what you were brought up in, and from people as good as you? Ah, they do not know what that three days' journey implies, and that the death and resurrection of Christ place you where you are no more of the world than He is! Egypt—luxurious, civilized, self-satisfied, idolatrous Egypt—and the wilderness! what a contrast! Yet only in the wilderness can you sacrifice to God.

Then he tries another stratagem:—

"And he said unto them, Go serve the Lord your God; *but who are they that shall go?*

"And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go; for we must hold a feast unto the Lord.

"And he said unto them, Let the Lord be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look to it; for

evil is before you. Not so: go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord; for that ye did desire."

By their little ones he had them safe, of course—a perfectly good security that they would not go far away. And so it is still. How many are brought back into the world by the children they did not bring with them *out of* the world.

One last hope remains for Pharaoh:—

"And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord; *only let your flocks and your herds be stayed*: let your little ones also go with you."

"Leave your possessions," he says: and how many leave their possessions! Themselves are saved; but their business, their occupation, these are still not sacred things, they are secular: what have these things to do with the salvation of the soul? But God says, No: bring them all out of Egypt: yourselves, your families, your property, all are to be Mine.

And, in point of fact, His it must be if we would ourselves keep it, for we cannot keep it of ourselves. The man out of whom the demon went is our Lord's own illustration of the fact that an empty house will never lack a tenant. The sweeping and garnishing, and all that, will not keep out the devil, but perhaps only make him more earnest after occupation. Nothing will save from it but the positive occupation of it by another, who will not, and need not, give it up. So we must bring Christ into everything; or, by that in which He is not, we shall find we have but made room for another—Christ's opposite. The parable has application in many ways, and in many degrees, to those who are Christ's people, as well as to those who are not. Our idle hours are not idle. Our useless occupations have a use—if not for Christ, then against Him. Our so-called recreations may be but the frittering away of energy, and seeds of distraction. We are in a world where on every side we are exposed to in-

fluences of the most subtle character; where corruption and decay are natural; and where all that is not permeated by divine life becomes the speedy subject of decay and death. To a beleaguered garrison a holiday may be fatal. We cannot ungird our loins here, or unbuckle our armor. It is not enough to withstand in the evil day, but having done all, still you must stand. So, if you leave Christ at the door of the counting-house, you will have to contend alone, or give place to the devil within the counting-house. No, Christ must be a constant Saviour as to every detail of our walk and ways.

How important it is to be right here! It is not a mere question of points of detail; it is a question of truth of heart to Him, which affects every detail—the whole character and complexion of our lives, indeed. So you must not wonder at a question of *cattle* being concerned with a deeper question of salvation itself—looking at salvation as not merely being from wrath and condemnation, but of salvation from the sin also which brings in these. Be persuaded of it, beloved friends, that only thus can we find, in the full power of it, what salvation is.

We have been looking at this from the side of responsibility. Surely it is good to look at it also from the side of salvation. Until you are clean delivered in these three respects you cannot be happily with God, nor even safe. Of course, I am not talking about reaching heaven: you may be safe in that respect. But whatever you have that is not Christ's, that is the world's still, will drag you back into the world. Can you go to your business and shut the door upon Him and He not feel it, and *you* not feel it? Can you say to Him: Lord, Sunday is yours, and Monday is mine; or, Lord, there is your tenth, and these nine are mine—and feel perfectly satisfied that all is right with Him? Better keep it all back, than give in that fashion; for the amount given just hinders from realizing where we are.

In this great world of sorrow and of evil, Christ has interests dear to His heart—how dear, no one of us has perhaps a notion of. Souls lie in darkness to whom His Word would give light, and in bondage to whom it would bring deliverance. He says to us, I count upon my people to do this. How can we answer to Him for this confidence He has placed in us? Shall we say, Lord, I have had to keep up with my neighbors, to provide for the future, to do a great many things which I thought of more importance? Or, shall we say, Lord, Thou art so great, so high, so powerful, Thou surely canst not want my help in a matter like this! Or, Lord, Thou art so gracious, I am sure Thou wilt accept anything I may bring. I would not suppose Thee a hard Master, to want me to bring Thee much? Alas, what shall we say? Shall we not rather own with broken hearts how little we have valued *Him*?

The “doctrine of Balaam” thrives upon the heartlessness of God’s own people. Do not let us imagine, because we denounce the mercenary character of what is current all around, that we can have no share in upholding what we denounce. It is far otherwise. If we have, or are giving cause to those who sneer at the advocates of “cheap religion,” we are giving it the most effectual possible support.

Beloved, I have spoken out my heart, and I must pray you bear with me. Who that looks around, with a heart for Christ, upon all the abominations practiced in His name, but must be led to ask, Did not all this evil spring out of the failure of His own people, of those who at heart loved Him? And further, how far are we perhaps now, unsuspectedly, helping on the very evils we deplore? Do we not pray for Him to search out our hearts, and shall we shrink from having them searched out? If the search detects nothing, we need not fear it. If it shows us unanticipated evil, it is well to realize that

the truthful judgment of the evil is ever the truest blessing for our souls. It will cost us something, no doubt, to walk in what is ever a narrow way—a race, a warfare, calling for energy and self-denial. But ah, beloved, it will cost us more, much more, to have Christ walk as a stranger to us, because our paths and His do not agree.

But the door is open, beloved, to come back. *He* has never shut it. The one thing so greatly lacking now is whole-hearted integrity. So few without some secret corner in their hearts they would not like to have searched out by Him. That corner *must* be searched out, for He must be a Saviour after His own fashion; and if we would not have it, we can have little apprehended the fulness and reality of His salvation. Not alone does He save from wrath—He saves from *sin*. It is in subjection to His yoke that we find rest.

God grant it to us for His name's sake even now.

LECTURE IV.

THE WOMAN JEZEBEL, AND THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH
(Rev. ii. 18-23).

WE are going on to-night with the fourth of these epistles to the seven churches—the epistle to Thyatira. It is only the first part of this that we shall have before us now. The latter part will be reserved until another time, if the Lord will.

We have now come to what has very plain and simple application to Popery, or Romanism. We have been tracing the steps leading down to it; and when we begin to speak of Romanism (if this be a true application we are making in this address now), let us remember that God looks at it as inside of what, in a certain sense, He owns as His. I do not mean that He owns the woman Jezebel, but that He does own the church of Thyatira, where the woman Jezebel is. It is not something outside, with which we have nothing to do, but merely to let alone. It is not something that has arisen independently, outside of us (though we are surely separate from it,) it is something that is only the legitimate result, the full ripe fruit, of what we have seen maturing in former epistles.

We have, in fact, been tracing its gradual rise. First, the Assembly of God—the called out ones, losing their separate place as that, and becoming a “Synagogue”—a mere gathering of people indiscriminately, as it were, together. Then we have seen the appointment of a distinct class of priests to go between God and the people, because the people were now strangers, in fact, and not able to go to God for themselves. That is what we mean

by "clerisy." In the next place, we have seen the marriage between the Church and the world—her complete settlement in it; and how this necessarily gave her the things of the world, only to become baits to worldly men to assume the rôle of Christian teachers, who themselves, on the other hand, brought in the doctrine of Balaam, teaching and seducing God's people more and more to amalgamate with those around them, and to give up all pretence of separation. That was Balaam's work with Israel, whose history has been, as it were, the anticipation of our own. Now we come to the church of Thyatira—the full ripe result of this—the woman Jezebel, who is doing systematically, and as a prophetess, what they had done as individuals, and with less pretension.

I do not intend to confine myself to what is called Roman Catholicism. If we were merely looking at it in that way, we should be attacking something we have very little to do with. But I want to show you that the very principle that is so plain in Popery obtains much more widely, in fact, with those even who have come out of Popery, and who ecclesiastically are fully outside.

I must, first of all, however, show the application to Popery itself. Evidently, the great point in this epistle is the sufferance of this woman Jezebel. This woman Jezebel is now at the same work as the followers of Balaam formerly. But, as I have just now said, they were but individuals. Now the professing church as a whole is doing it—for this is the force and meaning of "the woman." This woman is teaching and claiming absolute authority, the authority of a prophetess—that is, in fact, inspiration for her teaching. She is claiming infallible authority. And yet, according to the Scriptures, the woman has no right to teach. "I suffer not a woman to teach" is the principle there. In Scripture, the Church is always the woman, never the man. This is very simple, because the Church is what is espoused to Christ, and it is Christ

who is the Man to whom she owns subjection. It is from Christ, therefore, the Word has to come to her. The moment she herself presumes to teach, that very moment she is of necessity setting up an independent authority apart from Christ. She is in revolt from her proper allegiance to Him who is professedly her *Lord*.

It is the woman in the Man's place here. It is the Church, substituting herself for Christ. She bears also a remarkable name—Jezebel, which carries us back to the days of Ahab, king of Israel,—those days of the very worst part of Israel's history, and of one who, though queen of Israel, was a Canaanite, an idolatress, and a bitter persecutor of God's saints and prophets.

I need scarcely point out to you how remarkably this name Jezebel suits the well-proved character of the Romish church. If you go on to Babylon the great, the woman of the seventeenth chapter of this book of Revelation, you find her drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And there she is pointed out as sitting upon the seven hills, and the city reigning over the kings of the earth.

Her name is remarkable in another way. The most commonly accepted meaning of the word Jezebel is "chaste." While the Lord speaks of her fornication and killing her children with death, her pretension is the exact opposite. She pretends to be the chaste spouse of Christ; and in the seventeenth chapter she is called the harlot. What is her character? Every one knows that she claims infallibility for her teaching—it is her boast. No church has gone to the full extent of that as Rome has. She claims to be a prophetess, and therefore to speak with authority from God, oracularly, and yet she at the same time is teaching and seducing God's servants "to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." She is putting the seal of God on the most horrible iniquity.

The very commencement of the address here has marked reference to her teaching. In other cases you find the Lord presenting Himself in a character suited to the state which He is addressing. Here He presents Himself as "the Son of God." There is nothing more distinct in the teaching of Rome than that He is simply the Son of Mary. They exalt Mary above Him in every possible way. They say Mary is a woman, and has a tender heart; therefore go to Mary rather. Mary, too, is a mother, and she can command her Son. Even if they own Him to be God, this still serves to exalt Mary more; for then Mary is the mother of God and queen of heaven. That is the blasphemy of Rome. The Lord takes distinctly therefore here His own proper title as the Son of God. How striking it is! If we look into it, we shall find every word applying in the most complete way to that of which it speaks. This woman Jezebel is the Church in Christ's place; lowering Him, we may say, in every possible way to exalt herself; setting aside His Word to introduce her own, and claiming for her word that authority which she denies to the word of God itself.

You know how she denies it. She will tell you—exalting at the same time her own tradition to a level with it—that there is no doubt at all that it is the word of God; but she will tell you at the same time that you cannot understand it except as you listen to her teaching. Practically it is her teaching you are to hear: as she misapplies Scripture, you are to "hear the Church," and will give you Matt. xviii. 17 for it. If you ask, on the other hand, how you are to know the Church, she will give you marks, as Unity, Sanctity, Catholicity, Apostolicity (not one of which, notoriously, applies to her); but she will not send you to ascertain her character from that very book which she calls the word of God, and which she pleads in behalf of her own authority! She opens the book to show you a fragment of a sentence—"hear the Church"—and

then she shuts it tight between her fast-closed hands, and says, with a self-possession that almost redeems it from absurdity,—“and that is myself; you must hear *Me!*” So, in point of fact, what she inculcates is the blindest possible credulity.

But I do not dwell upon this any longer. We want to have something that concerns ourselves. And I think there is no difficulty in finding that which concerns us abundantly in the very principles which are involved in this. We may think ourselves quite outside of Popery, while we are holding the very principles of Popery itself. We may have got the root, while disclaiming the proper fruit of the tree; but, beloved friends, the root, undoubtedly, is to be found everywhere in the soil, and plenty of fruit too. That root is the Church's authority to teach—to give forth what you are to listen to as, in some sense, authoritative, because she teaches it.

Of course, when I say that, I admit fully that that is maintained in very different degrees and ways. If I go to Ritualism, I shall find, for instance, pretension almost as high as that of Rome herself, only connecting itself with an antique Catholicism of whose traditions they are merely the jealous guardians. This is still the infallible oracular Church, only with an infallibility less tangible, and doctrines less defined.

But church-teaching is not necessarily connected with this pretension at all. If we look through Christendom, we shall find almost every little sect in it professing to define for herself doctrines which she holds, and which she insists upon her members holding. I do not mean to say that they claim infallibility at all, or that they do not appeal to God's blessed word for what they hold as truth. That, of course, is all right and in place, but I mean something very different from that. I mean, if you take, for instance, the churches of the Reformation, and those which have sprung out of them since, you will find

that every one is still holding fast this principle—that the Church is to teach, and it is necessary that a body of doctrine should be put forth as church-teaching to which appeal can be made, and which may answer for the truth their members hold. In this we have, spite of its disguise, what I may call an essential principle of Romanism—the Church's, instead of Christ's authority—the Church pretending to give a word which is authoritative to those who, if they are not members of Christ, *are nothing*.

Let us look at it a little more fully. As I say, in the first place, there is this pretension about it—the Church claims to be a teacher. I will not say now an infallible teacher—that would be pure Romanism: but nevertheless a teacher. And those who hold to the Church, whatever that church may be, are at any rate bound to submit to her teaching. Now if we take Scripture, how completely contrary it is to all this. In the first place, what is the Church? The Church is the assembly of God's people—the assembly that is Christ's body: its members are members of Christ. From first to last in the New Testament, you will find no other equivalent of the Church, in God's thought. What man would make of it is recognized, I grant; but that is another thing. It is the Church which is Christ's body, and to it every member of Christ, and he alone, belongs. But when that is said, the question is, where is the teaching body? Plainly, the body of Christ is composed of all, teachers and taught alike. The very youngest babe in Christ belongs to that body as well as the oldest and most advanced. How is it possible, then, that this Church can give any authoritative utterance at all? The fact is, you must necessarily put aside that definition of the Church the moment you think of its teaching. Whom would it teach—itsself, the world, or what? Is it not plain that you must not confound the teachers and the taught?

And if the Church is the teacher, the teaching must be for those outside the Church. And who teaches the Church?

Every creed and confession is, in fact, the faith at first of a few, addressed to those outside the few who put it forth. It may gain adherents, and become the faith in that way of a great number; but however that may be, the authoritative teaching is only that of the original few, binding, to whatever extent, even the teachers of the same body afterward. For when you say, the Church teaches us so and so, you do not mean the present teachers. You may be, in fact, recalling them to the teaching of the Church, or convicting them of departure from it. The teaching which binds (or is supposed to bind) is not the teaching of the Church to-day, but the teaching of certain teachers in the past. The Church, then, is not here the teacher, but has only bound itself to receive such and such teaching. The whole weight of some imposing name is attached to the teaching of those who, if they lived in the present generation, would not be recognized at all as having the same authority.

But apart altogether from Scripture, which is not in question here, what gave this place to teachers of the past, which those of the present may not pretend to? Have we not the same Spirit as they had? Have we not the same Word to enlighten? We may be less spiritual—true: but are not the Word and the Spirit of God as sufficient for us now as when these church-confessions were made?

If we turn to Rome we shall find her more consistent, and therefore more wholly wrong. She does not exalt the past above the present, but claims the same infallibility as resident in the Church at all times. And as there are no degrees in infallibility, her decrees of yesterday have all the authority of Scripture itself. But here the voice of the Church means the voice of the Pope, or the

Pope with the bishops and the cardinals; and it would be nothing but sheer irony to tell the simple layman that *he* had anything to do with the decree declaring the Pope infallible, or the Virgin Mary immaculate, except in obeying it.

Some may think this a quibble, and that "the voice of the Church" does not mean that the Church teaches otherwise than through its teachers; and this would avail for Rome better than for the Protestant bodies, if (a great deal often depends upon "if") if it could be maintained. But it cannot; for the teacher is not the instrument, or mouthpiece, of the Church, but of Christ through the Spirit. "*He* gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some pastors and teachers." And not only so, but the apostle John can speak to Christians as having the Word of truth and the Spirit of truth, as being in a true sense independent of teachers. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," says he, "and know all things." And again: "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but the same anointing teacheth you all things, and is truth, and is no lie" (1 John ii. 20, 27).

There is indeed infallibility, and available for every Christian; but it is the infallibility of the Spirit, not of the Church, nor of man: an anointing which every Christian has received, and which renders him, as I have said, independent of teachers even, in a true sense—which we must guard, however, from constructions that man's pride would put upon it. The apostle evidently does not mean that teachers are superfluous, or an excrescence upon the body of the Church. He does not mean to make every man a teacher, nor that God will maintain him in independence of ministries which He has Himself ordained. He does not mean us to be isolated units. The Church of God is a body in which the highest cannot say "unto the lowest, "I have no need of you." He who re-

fuses the help that God supplies him with need not wonder if he be left to prove the folly and barrenness of self-sufficiency.

But yet there is truth—deep and needed truth for us—in just these words: “Ye know all things, and need not that any one teach you.” It is the knowledge springing from daylight and good eyes. The best eyes would not avail in darkness; nor the best light, if we were blind. But the Word is light, and the Spirit of God has rolled off the darkness from our eyes. To men with proper sight, in daylight, I can say, not only, “you can see,” but, “you see all things.” I do not mean the antipodes, or the other side of the moon; I simply mean that whatever is before you your own eyes can see. You are not like a blind man, needing to take it on my authority that the sun is shining, or the clouds threaten rain. Yet I may call your attention to it, or I may put an object before you which was not in your field of view before. And this is the proper office of a teacher: not to give authority to truth, nor yet to decide for you that such or such a thing is true, but merely to put that before you which must authenticate to you both itself and me—itsself as truth, and me as a teacher of truth.

Here the Word and the Spirit have their proper supremacy with the soul. They, and they alone, are the guarantee of truth. They, and they alone, are my true and abundant security as to doctrine.

But here is the trouble with these confessions of faith—which you will understand I am not finding the least fault with, as the confession of the faith of those who drew them up. I may thank God for the Augsburg confession as a protest against error, while I refuse it as an authority to define or limit my faith. And this is what it came to be used for, as a test of truth and as security for its preservation—how feeble as such all Germany bears witness at this day. And no wonder; for

thus the apostles' teachings (what they presented to the Church as truth) is set aside, nay, proclaimed insufficient and untrustworthy. The Bible! why plenty of Unitarians will accept the Bible! What then? Why, get a *human* declaration as to the deity of Christ, and that will settle the matter. I am not accusing people of intentional dishonor to the Word or Spirit of God, but, none the less, such it is in fact.

It is the common sin and shame of the whole Church of God. It has been our own, I suppose—all of us. And if unbelief introduced these things at first, unbelief no less maintains them. And we who have had so long in our hands an open Bible are proportionately responsible, are we not? surely much more than those who lived in the days when it was only just re-opened. I do not say that those who hold these things follow them out to their conclusion, but I am justified in giving the conclusion to which they may be followed out. What the Lord says is true in this application, "Ye shall know them by their fruits: do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

And here, do not let yourselves be misled by the common thought that men of God could not teach what is false. In that way the goodness of a man is set up against the truth of the word of God; and, as I have already said, God's word is not allowed to be authoritative because good men speak different things. Men equally good and learned, who have taken equal pains (we suppose) to ascertain what it is they teach, are nevertheless teaching things directly opposite to one another. Yet God has given His Spirit to lead into all truth, and He has said, "If any one will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." How are you to connect these things to make them harmonize? If you take men's goodness as security for their doctrine, you cannot do it. Thus it is that so many cast the authority

of Scripture overboard. You must not be so presumptuous as to say you have the *truth*. You may have opinions. What is the worth of an opinion? Suppose it leads you wrong? If it is *my* opinion, it is what I have no title to have, if the word of God is to be authoritative. Has He spoken unintelligibly, or can His blessed Spirit teach contradictory things? We must think so if we look at man's goodness and man's character, instead of testing by the Word all he brings.

God meant, and has told us distinctly, that by the Word we are to test everything. Will men submit to that appeal? "Search the Scriptures" were His own words, "for these are they which testify of Me." So the Bereans (so often spoken of, so little followed!) are noticed as more noble than those of Thessalonica because, as to what even an apostle said, "they searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Where else shall we find certainty at all? You may talk of presumption, but, I tell you, in the presence of eternity we do want certainty—something that we can lean upon that will not give way. And it is the lack of certainty that is the feebleness of so much evangelical Protestantism. Infidelity is "*positivism*," and Rome is as bold as ever with her claim to possess absolute truth. How will you stand against the two, if you alone are uncertain? The Romanist naturally turns to you and says, Don't you want certainty? I say, Surely I do; and therefore I go to that which only can give it—the word of God, and the Spirit of God. The moment you bring in other authorities the word of God is gone.

Take, for instance, the so-called Church of England: if such and such a person teaches error, they do not bring the Bible into court, and look at that. *It has no place there*. I say distinctly, in judging what is heresy it has nothing more to do than if it were not in existence. It is the Prayer Book that must decide; and if it is not con-

demned by the Prayer Book, the man is entitled to hold it, rank as the heresy may be. It is what Christians are groaning over in every direction, but they do not impute it to the right source. They do not see that it is the very necessity of a creed, which they suppose will secure the truth—that the necessary effect of the creed is that it removes the real standard of truth out of court altogether, and puts something else in its place. We need not question the piety of the men who composed the creed; yet, none the less, what is the result? Of course, they could not foresee what new heresies would arise; they could not guard every gap. They were not prescient as the Author of Scripture is. So their notable security for truth actually is in the way of their dealing with the error. They have barred God out from settling it in His own way; and their unbelief in His wisdom and care ties them hand and foot, and delivers them over to the enemy.

Let me ask you seriously, do you really think God's mind is really less certain, less clear, less plain-speaking, than man's word? You say that people profess to find this and that doctrine in Scripture. It is quite true; but do you really mean to say that, after all, man's word is clearer, and so can be greater security than God's word? If you realize it as His Word, you cannot surely argue so. Is it not God speaking to man?—a Father to His children? Does He not speak even to babes—not to the learned, but the unlearned? If all this be true (and it is the simplest truth that can be), what must be the result? The result is, that God's word must be simpler, truer, safer to trust to, far, than any possible human creed can be. And to supplement it with a creed, an authoritative creed, is, in fact, to supplant it: it is to say, God has not done for us what man can do; that God has not cared for us with even the care we have for one another.

The next result of a human creed is necessarily sectarianism and schism. I know this is a very little matter in people's eyes now, and I grant there is something that is worse in God's eyes—that false unity which people claim in Rome—a unity, not internal and spiritual, but external, secured by an authoritative putting down of all dissent from it. That unity did practically obtain for ages; and what do we call those times? We call them truly "The Dark Ages:" that was when the Church's dictum (in opposition to God's word) was most authoritative.

Where there is not power to repress dissent after this fashion, the result of an authoritative creed is to produce divisions. Being human merely, it will not, of course, be perfect: it will give the measure of its composer's knowledge, and, very naturally, also bear the marks of his failure, wherever he has failed to apprehend the teaching of the Word. These errors are now, *equally with the truth itself*, bound upon all by the same authority. People must submit, and do violence to their consciences, or they must respect their consciences and go outside. The confession becomes thus a party badge. It binds people together by the very beliefs in which they differ from other Christians, whom they cannot but own to be walking as godly as themselves. Scripture itself has to be interpreted in conformity with the creed, and where it cannot be silenced sectarians are made in plenty, and doctrines are changed from their design of edification to be the unholy watchwords of intestine strife.

So we have lost practically the blessed name of Christians, and are known as Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Baptists—names derived from our differences only. Our differences are exalted above what we have in common, and the body of Christ is rent into many bodies, which become, therefore, human organizations, not divine. God's Church is owned to be the true one, but it is invis-

ible. There are practical working churches, which accommodate themselves better to the many minds of men, and which they can regulate to their own satisfaction.

Who takes the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians as defining the actual church to which they belong? In what church is "membership" neither more nor less than membership of Christ? Who takes the fourteenth chapter as regulating the Church's coming together? Yet the apostle there exhorts every one who pretends to be spiritual to acknowledge the things he writes unto them are the commandments of the Lord. Is it all antiquated and passed away, or applies to an invisible body nowhere to be found on earth?

On the other hand, they tell us that—

"The *visible* Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered," etc.; and that

"The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority on controversies of faith."

Whose is this voice? It is *not* Jezebel's: there is no pretension to infallibility, but the contrary: the Church "must not ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written;" and there is danger of it, for "as the church of Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch have erred, so also the church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith."

This is not infallibility, but, on the other hand, a very simple acknowledgment of danger in submitting to this authority that the Church is said to have. Yet she is maintained in the power she has abused, and is only warned not to ordain anything contrary to God's word. But who is to decide if she does? And what are we to do, if she does? Conform in spite of conscience, or go outside the Church? Both the one and the other have

been done by tens of thousands; and the Church's authority has been maintained in Protestant England at the cost of innumerable troubled consciences, and the secession of the truest, bravest, godliest men she ever had. The Act of Uniformity emptied two thousand pulpits at once. How many have submitted, not strong enough to contend, not true enough to make the sacrifice demanded, the day of manifestation alone will show. How many at present do violence to their own consciences every time they use the baptismal services, who shall say? It cannot be helped, they say, for the Church has authority to decree, and she has no infallibility to save her from decreeing error! Does the word of God indeed give authority where there is such manifest incompetency to use it? No, emphatically; God forbid! It is the Church's *own* decree, not God's; the woman in the place of the man, and thus confusion.

Jezebel goes farther than this, and wisely. She does not proclaim her authority and her incompetency in one breath. She is a prophetess, and "infallible," the only ground upon which her authority can be righteously maintained. But she is emphatically the preacher of unrighteousness, teaching and seducing Christ's people to eat idol-offerings and commit fornication. It is the "woman" of the thirteenth of Matthew putting the leaven into the fine flour of the meat-offering; for it is Lev. ii. that explains the parable there. Just as the "tree" of the third parable shows the result of the word of the Kingdom to be the establishment of a Babel-like power in the world, (and this answers to Pergamos) so the "woman" of the fourth parable corresponds to the "woman" of the fourth epistle; and the "meal" of the parable would be better rendered by the "fine flour" of Leviticus. That fine flour is Christ, the bread of life, the food of His people, and the woman might lawfully have this and distribute it. But she is doing more—she is adding of

her own to it, and this is to adulterate and spoil it. God has given her no right of manufacture of His people's food. If she adds anything to it, it is "leaven"—corruption. The leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod, are what the Lord Himself points out as the danger in connection with His people's food (Matt. xvi. 12; Mark viii. 15); and this He plainly points out to be their "doctrine." The doctrine of the Pharisees was ritualism and superstition; the doctrine of the Sadducees was rationalistic infidelity; the doctrine of the Herodians was a courtiership of the world. And here are plainly still the adulterations of Christianity. It is the *Man's* voice, Christ's, which alone has title to be heard by the people of God; when the *woman* speaks, it is at once insubordination and corruption.

Unhappily those who at the Reformation so nobly and boldly protested against the doings and sayings of the woman Jezebel left the root of it untouched in not protesting against *all* church legislation in the things of God. Had they left legislation to the righteous Lawgiver, and claimed for the Church the simple duty of obedience to Him—had they maintained the authority of His Word alone, and for power the power only of His Spirit—how different would the result have been! Instead of this, they took away but infallibility from the woman, (owned the actual bad fruit of her teaching,) and then, having branded her thus as evil and incapable, set her up again as before, with only an admonition to teach truly and according to the Word. The natural result followed. Men having the Word in their hands now, and having learnt that the Church was fallible, soon found her teaching actually false. Division followed—discord—doubt of all truth—until infidelity, on the one hand, proclaims that nothing can be really known; while Jezebel looks down from her prophet's chair and asks, "Does not 'babel'

mean 'confusion'?—where is the real confusion? with your many voices, or my single one?"

And, in truth, does not "Babylon the great" extend further, however much her seat may be, and is, in Rome? When God's judgment fell upon the old typical city—the seat of empire of the first apostate—and when, scattered necessarily by the confusion of speech, they separated and left off building the city, did not those who abandoned the plain of Shinar carry with them, in their diverse speech, the evidence that they too were only hindered by that effectual impediment from building Babel still? And are not the diverse tongues of Protestantism a sign of how thoroughly God hates *mere* outward, earthly, ecclesiastical unity?—only thus hindered from being built up again.

Yet let us not be dismayed. God and His truth remain the same. "He that will do His will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." If we will be content in weakness and nothingness to be doers of His will, seeking, not name or power, but the blessedness of proving the peace and pleasantness of His holy ways, we shall find His truth the same as ever, and His strength made perfect in our weakness still. If but "two or three," literally, were left together, His "there am I" has provided not only blessing but sanction for them. Was there any other with whom Enoch walked, who of old "walked with God?" We know not: but only of himself (in his generation) is this written. The "two or three" seems to assure us it shall not quite be that with us. But still, as singly, must our feet be walking as it were *alone* with God.

We shall look at Jezebel in yet another character, if the Lord will, next time. But I put it to you now, whether these church-teachings—much wider than Jezebel's—have not, in fact, the character I have attributed to them; whether they are not based upon a false assumption of

authority where Christ's word gives none? whether they do not suppose God's word to be incomplete and less plain-speaking than man's? and whether they have not led, and do not lead, to the scattering of Christ's sheep, instead of gathering them? They do, no doubt, assume to be for gathering, not scattering; but we must mark well our Lord's words: "He that gathereth not WITH ME, scattereth abroad." As a fact, is not the result further and further division?—must it not necessarily be so?

And if all this be true, what is our duty when the Church presumes to step into Christ's place, and claim the obedience which is His due alone? Is it humility to give way and say nothing? Is it loyalty to Him to give up what is His due. Surely every honest-hearted servant of His will answer, No. Let then the answer be practical and outspoken. Let us return to the simple blessedness of hearing His words and doing His will—to the yoke which, being His (far different to what the Church's yoke has ever proved), is easy, and to His burden, which is light. Let us hear the words which, as they come down to us from the centuries of the past, approve themselves as indeed prophetic: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

LECTURE V

YE HAVE REIGNED AS KINGS WITHOUT US
(Rev. ii. 23-29)

AS I have already said, we have here the full, ripe fruit of the Church's declension. We have, in a sense, the perfect development, the full corn in the ear, ready for the sickle of judgment at His coming again—a coming first announced here in these addresses. The ripe fruit tells us what the tree is; the end tells us what the thing has been from the beginning. If we look at the church of Thyatira, or rather at the woman Jezebel, we shall see that in every way Christ's word and Christ's person are superseded by her. It is the Church that is the teacher and not Christ; and the Church has slipped into the throne and is reigning upon the earth before the Lord's time has come to reign—that is, in the sense in which alone His saints could share the Kingdom with Him.

We shall see directly that there is a sense in which He reigns now. But this is not a throne which the Lord can share with His saints. That throne is yet to be set up, and the Church reigning in the meanwhile without Christ is really reigning in His despite, fulfilling the words addressed long before to the church at Corinth: "Ye have reigned as kings without us." They had left the apostles out, and were reigning, with these still suffering. *They* were not reigning. "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last," says one of these, "as it were appointed unto death, for we are a spectacle unto the world, to angels, and to men" (1 Cor. iv. 9).

The apostles certainly, whatever may be true of their successors, did not reign. They disclaimed it in the fullest possible way. And the whole of the New Testament is against the idea of any reigning now until the Lord Himself comes, and takes that throne, which, as I said before, He can share with His people.

But let us look now at this state of things in Thyatira, and we shall see how it is in fact a perfect denial, I may say, of two grand features of Christianity. These two grand features are, *Christ's absence* as rejected and the Church being a mourner until He returns, on the one hand; and, on the other, *the supremacy of the Holy Ghost*, meanwhile, as come down into the world to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. These are really the two forms of denial which you see in a glaring way in the church of Rome—the woman Jezebel. These are the two things prominently denied there. She reigns, in her thought, rightly even over kings,—Christ Himself not being here but still rejected,—and there is a vicar of Christ, a *human* vicar in place of the divine One. Jezebel has usurped the authority and attributes of the divine One. She reigns, instead of being subject; and her infallibility becomes her practical denial of His.

Let us look at these two things. In the first place, however, let us be clear that the Lord does reign now. I do not mean to deny that, as a truth, but on the contrary assert it in the fullest way. There *is* a Kingdom—the Kingdom of heaven now. Do not let us fall into the mistake that the Kingdom of heaven does not exist now. It does exist, although it exists in a form of which the prophets of the Old Testament knew nothing. It exists in that form called in the thirteenth of Matthew the “Mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven.” This mystery-form is a form which the prophets and spiritual men of old knew nothing of, and said nothing about. It was hidden from ages and generations. As you find

in the same chapter that the Lord spake in parables, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret since the foundation of the world."

That is what we have here: what has been kept secret from the foundation of the world. The Kingdom was not a secret. It was clear enough that Messiah was to have a kingdom, and sit upon the throne. But the throne and Kingdom in the form in which we now have it, (the Son of God sitting upon the *Father's* throne,—not the Son of man sitting on His own, a human throne,—but the Son of God sitting upon His Father's throne) is not Old Testament doctrine. And a Kingdom with the King rejected and absent, and true disciples suffering instead of reigning, is an equally strange thought there.

You will find, if you look at the end of the third chapter of Revelation, the Lord reminds Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." And the moment you think of that,—the Son of God on the Father's throne,—you will see He could not share that throne with His disciples. None of us could sit upon the Father's throne! and thus although it is quite true He is reigning now, it is not true that His disciples are reigning with Him now. It is false, utterly false. He is reigning now on the Father's throne, and we are translated, as you have it in the first chapter of the epistle to the Colossians: "Translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son" (13th ver.), not of the Son of *man*, but of *God's* dear Son.

You will notice in the appearing of the Lord, in the day of His manifestation, that it is as the Son of man He appears. "You shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." That introduces the Kingdom of the Son of man. And going back to Daniel, you will

see in the seventh chapter, how the Son of man comes and receives a kingdom. Again in the first part of this book of Revelation, in the first chapter, it is One like the Son of man who walks in the midst of the candlesticks, and who speaks therefore as such to Laodicea.

Now, when the Son of man takes His own throne, as such, He has got a throne to share with His people. He will have His people to share that throne with Him: but in the meanwhile to speak of sharing His throne is utter ignorance; none but Himself can fill God's—the Father's, throne. That is the throne He has now as the Son of God. His own throne is as the Son of man, and then, and then alone, we reign with Him.

Now that at once gives us clearly the present state of things. In the meanwhile what have we here? Why, suffering, as a matter of course. The King is rejected, although on the throne of God. God has placed Him there, until His enemies are made His footstool, and that, however shortly it may be, is not so yet.

You will find the second psalm full of that thought. That psalm, you will remember, the apostle quotes in the beginning of the Acts as true of the Lord in that day, when the whole world was linked together, the nations and the people of Israel too, against the King whom God had anointed on the holy hill of Zion—the King of the Jews. But death cannot hold Him: He is taken up out of the sealed-up sepulchre. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (ver. 4)—that is where He is sitting, "in the heavens." "Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure" (ver. 6). Then God's voice comes out; "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." And the Lord says: "I will declare the decree; the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee;"—that is as man. "*To-day* I have begotten Thee" would not be applicable to the Lord as the

Only-begotten of the Father. It is only true of Him as born upon the earth. "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession: Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron." A very striking word we have there: that word "rule." The words in this second chapter of Revelation are evidently taken from that second psalm. That ruling, though with a rod of iron, is really shepherding. In the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew the quotation from Micah gives the same thought: "And thou, Bethlehem, . . . out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule My people Israel." It is the same expression, "shall *shepherd* My people Israel." Out of Bethlehem God's shepherd-king had come before, king David, the very type of Christ: and where He rules with a rod of iron, that is yet a shepherd's care and love. Love, if need be, can strike. It is a mistake to imagine any inconsistency in this. The "rod of iron" is for preservation no less than for destruction: nay, preservation is the end in view; it is to "destroy them that destroy the earth," and to make even the earth a place where peace will flourish as the effect of righteousness.

"Ask of Me," Jehovah says, and He has not asked; —He is still sitting in patience, and we are therefore, as the apostle John, "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. i. 9). His long-suffering is now salvation. When it is over, and delay would be, not blessing, not long-suffering, but weakness, it is with the rod of iron that He takes the ends of the earth for His possession,—not, as people imagine, with the gospel. The twenty-sixth of Isaiah shows that grace has been tried, and found ineffectual. The gospel has been going out for centuries and had no effect in converting the mass of mankind. When the Lord comes, this confederacy of the nations against Him will be showing itself in its full

character, as the psalm depicts it. They will be saying more than ever, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." And "then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure." He will use, in contrast with grace, the iron rod; and here He associates His people with Himself: "And he that overcometh and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall *shepherd* them with a rod of iron,"—the same word—"as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star" (vers. 25, 27, 28).

There you have what we are waiting for. In the meanwhile, to have a kingdom, to pretend to rule, or to have the upper hand in a world where Satan is really god and prince is only necessarily to compromise with Satan. We may be sure that he who offered the Lord all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them, would not be slow to tempt His people somewhat after the same fashion. And so he has done. But the Church has not been faithful as the Lord was. She has been flattered into believing the world was growing better, when she ought to be ashamed of being less distasteful to it than He was, and has accepted the thought of a Millennium with Christ absent and the devil here.

When the Millennium really comes, and before you hear of the saints' reign, the reign of Satan comes to an end. Satan is bound, and cast into the bottomless pit, and shut up for the thousand years. There is no reigning of Satan then,—no allowing Satan to reign while the Lord is reigning. Christ is coming to put down all opposition and have undisputed sway. As a consequence you will find that a real belief in the Lord's coming is thus a very practical thing.

If, on the other hand, we believe that on the whole the world is going on well, and its conversion by the gospel

progressing, how can it but affect all our estimate of its character, and our need of separation from it? How then could we speak of the world as a thing to be overcome—a scene in which all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution? Did they bare the cross in past generations that we might wear the crown to-day? Thus the whole character of the Christian life is in this respect changed.

The Lord Himself shows the usurpation of authority, and worldly ways, to be the effect of putting off His coming: “If that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth His coming”—what then? “And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken,”—there is already what is only perfected in Jezebel.

The time of the Church’s reign therefore was necessarily the time of its worst corruption. Men call it “the Dark Ages,” It was a very distinct step beyond the Pergamos condition we were looking at before. There, if the Church were united to the world, she was not as yet its mistress. On the contrary, the Christian emperors were the rulers, convoked councils, placed and displaced bishops, and had in every way the upper hand. So that the Church became,—for her own interests no doubt, but still—a mere tool in their hands.

Again, in the churches of the Reformation, (so far as they were established churches) there the rulers of the State obtained ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and became heads of the Church in their respective countries. This was evil, a terrible evil, but it is not Jezebel. Jezebel had her foot (and in theory always has her foot) upon the necks of kings—and distinctly quoted Scripture for her supremacy: the very same Scripture too that people are quoting now in behalf of what they call a spiritual millennium. The promises of the Old Testament to an earthly people, (which the apostle in the ninth chapter of

Romans claims as belonging to Israel still) these promises are spiritualized, as they call it, by being applied to the Church. In our Authorized Version you may find such applications constantly in the headings of chapters and of pages also. But the spiritualizing of the prophecies is, in fact, the *carnalizing* of the Church. For the *promises* are not spiritualized. The earthly is not translated into the heavenly, but earthly promises are applied as such to a heavenly people,—with what possible effect but that of making the people earthly?

Do not mistake me. If as Christians, we are “blessed with *all* spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” we are entitled to lay hold of every *spiritual* blessing, and by faith claim it as our own. Thus if God said to a saint of old, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,” the apostle tells us that *so* we may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper.” The promises to Moses or to Joshua we may apply to ourselves. This does not take them from those to whom they were addressed, nor does it authorize us in applying promises as to headship in the earth and such like in the same way. “All spiritual blessings *in heavenly places*” sufficiently distinguishes *our* portion.

That is not confined to Rome: it is everywhere. Rome has acted it out to the full; Rome has given us the ripe fruit; and what has the fruit been? What has her reign been? As you know, so far as she actually fulfilled this, it was a reign of terror for all God’s real saints. They were hunted into the dens and caves of the earth, to escape the power of what called itself “The Church.” Babylon, as we have it in the seventeenth chapter of this book, drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. That is how she used the power which she claims.

But as I said, we cannot leave this there. We cannot say, That is Popery; we have nothing to do with it.

The principles are all around us in the present day. We may have given up the fruits of the doctrine, but have we renounced the doctrine itself? Have we taken these words of the Lord as true and applicable—now as ever—“if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it.” These words are as true this day as in the day in which they were uttered. Have we apprehended them? Have we accepted the alternative,—the principles of His kingdom now, in the time of His patience?

What remains for us, then?—the cross! The glory beyond and the cross by the way are principles which the Lord connects together; and rough as the path may be, it is alone the path where the glory shines. God has “called us by glory and virtue.” “Virtue” here is “courage,” needed for the difficulties of the way. We are “strengthened with all might, according to the power of His glory, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Israel’s desert pilgrimage is the figure of our walk of faith over a soil where nothing naturally grows for us; our bread,—our sustenance,—has to come from heaven; the track of glory is traced on barren sands. Nay more, it is an enemy’s country; circumstances are against us; the world is against us. We can purchase even a truce only by unfaithfulness. We are the descendants of martyrs and confessors. We are the followers of One whom the world crucified, and who has left us an example that we should follow His steps in the midst of those inwardly as hostile as ever, even beneath the garb of Christianity itself. His own words warn us: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world the world would love his

own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore doth the world hate you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also."

Has new light in the present century dispelled these things as illusions? or are these things really true of us? Would it not be well to ask ourselves here to-night: What cross do I carry?—Do I carry *any*? People have got so low, that they talk about taking up their cross in getting up to speak in meetings sometimes. And if that is not our thought, yet how far do we apprehend that there is a cross at all? The common trials which come upon us as men, as in the flesh still, are not the cross. The cross is what is ours as *Christians*, and it still *is* ours, so far as we are practically Christians.

The Lord has not changed His thoughts, because the Church has bought her peace with the world by shameful compromise. No, they remain there in the Word, just as sharp, clear, and unmistakable as ever they were. And those who can read these passages to mean their entire opposite, have lost the power to interpret Scripture—or, rather, Scripture has lost its true power over them.

A few words now about another thing.

If the *Church* reigns in the absence of Christ, why then there must be something representing Him down here. He must have a vicar. He is not present (even the world cannot mistake that) except spiritually. He is at God's right hand. That is the common faith of Christianity, and it is the faith even of Rome,—although in spite of that her altars are continually proclaiming Him corporally present; the faith of Christianity is that Christ is away. But a visible kingdom requires a visible head. And I need not tell you that such they have given it. The Pope is, for Rome. Christ's vicar; it is the

natural development of the thought of church-government which historically preceded and led on to it; and which extends far beyond Rome. Presbyterianism, Prelacy, Popery, are but three steps in the same direction. Apostles are no more; and the Church is orphaned, if not governed in a visible manner. Hierarchical government in some form is a necessity to it.

Now the Lord has indeed a Vicar during His absence—a perfect, infallible Guide for His people, as well as a guide-book absolutely perfect. The Church has not only a perfect body of discipline, but One also who is the Interpreter and Administrator of it. It is the characteristic of God's people, that "as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." So distinctive and so wonderful a blessing is the presence of the Holy Ghost with us now, that, although the disciples in our Lord's day were blessed, by the fact of His presence with them, beyond all the generations previous, yet He could say to them, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you."

His presence in the believer makes even his body the temple of the Holy Ghost. So His presence in the Church makes it also "the temple of the living God." Looking at the Church again as the body of Christ, He is the One Spirit animating the body. As all the members move under the control of the spirit in the natural body, so in the body of Christ also. If the members do not understand and move in harmonious subjection to the spirit, we speak of it as disease; and it is not less, but more truly so in the body of Christ.

If we open the Acts, we shall find everywhere His presence—greater than apostles, higher than the highest there. From the day of His descent at Pentecost, He is supreme over all; and that supremacy becomes the harmony of action, the unity of spirit in the assembly.

Sovereignly He calls instruments as He will, and as sovereignly uses whom He calls. "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul," He says to the prophets and teachers at Antioch, "to the work whereunto I have called them . . . And they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia." How strange to read as power conferred on man to convey office what is really the naming of individuals by the Spirit Himself, as called and sent forth by Him: one of them being the man who asserts his own apostleship to be "not *of* men nor *by* man"!

"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, . . . they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not." "And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days, who said to Paul by the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem." Not ordinarily indeed, perhaps not often, was the bidding of the Spirit expressed as audibly; but the manner of communication was but circumstantial, and not of the essence of the matter. *He* was present, Comforter, Guide, Teacher, Witness; Spirit of the body, "dividing to every man severally as He will;" a divine Person, with divine power and divine authority.

Yet unseen! I grant the fatal flaw in all this for most. The Bible they can see, but it is not definite enough. The Spirit of God they cannot see, and alas, cannot believe in, in a practical way. "Whom the world cannot receive," says the Lord Himself, of the Holy Ghost, "because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." And when the line between the Church and the world is gone, who can wonder that this unbelief should be permeating the mass of what is professedly Christ's? It is not only Rome that refuses to the blessed Spirit the place He has come to fill. The unbelief which has denied the sufficiency of Scripture, and supplemented it by creeds which come soon to supplant it, has denied in the same way the

sufficiency of the Holy Ghost, and supplemented His authority with hierarchical governments to which, whatever the theory, He is practically unnecessary.

If you ask people what they mean by church-government, you will get various answers, no doubt; but they will all agree substantially in one thing. That one thing is, in an omission of what is indeed the key-stone of the arch. They will tell you, some, that they believe in an Episcopal form of government; some a Presbyterian; some a Congregational. And if you ask them further, Where do they put the Holy Ghost, you will find the mass of people even denying any special presence of the Holy Ghost as characterizing this dispensation. They will tell you, so far truly, that the Spirit of God has always been acting in the world from the creation of it; that the new birth has always been His work from Abel, or from Adam to this time. They believe too, in certain special gifts at the day of Pentecost, and for some time thereafter. But a distinctive "coming" in the place of Christ, a coming so important in character that it was expedient even for Christ to go away, that we might have it, they do not understand, and do not believe in. One well-known man, an Evangelical divine, Dr. Hugh McNeile, of Liverpool, when he had to admit that a personal "coming" of the Holy Ghost after the ascension of Christ, was taught in the Word, could only account for it by the supposition that, during the Lord's lifetime upon earth, all the operation of the Spirit was limited to Himself alone, so that the three and thirty years of our Lord's presence, were years in which no conversions could take place at all,—a barren time in the world's history, and utter desolation otherwise of spiritual influences!

Thus you will find that the *practical* faith in the Holy Ghost's presence now is scarcely faith in a *Person*. It is "influence," like rain, or dew, or gentle breeze,—and these are true and scriptural figures so far, but quite im-

personal. They talk of a "measure of the Spirit," and every fresh stirring of heart they find is a fresh "baptism" of the Spirit. The evident and necessary result is that they lose the first requisite for faith in Him as one come down to take charge for Christ on earth, to dwell as God in the house of God, to animate and govern the body of Christ, as the spirit in man guides and governs the natural body.

Hence church-government in people's minds has nothing to do really with His presence here. Bishops, priests, and deacons may need, and of course do need, His influences. So in theory does the Pope. But practically the ordering of things is (within certain limits, whether of church-tradition or of Scripture, so far as Scripture is supposed to serve) in human hands, and subject to human wills. "The Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith." "And those [ministers] we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work BY MEN who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to *call and send* ministers into the Lord's vineyard." But the Holy Ghost may not have "called or sent" them! Well, of course; and that is provided for: for "although in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, *and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the Word* and Sacraments, yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's, and DO MINISTER BY HIS COMMISSION AND AUTHORITY, we may use their ministry, both in hearing of the word of God, and receiving of the sacrament"!!

Thus they may have Christ's commission although the Holy Ghost hath *not* "called or sent" them; Christ and the Holy Ghost are made to be at issue; and the Church can go on ordering and ordaining in despite of the Spirit Himself!

And this is *order*; while those who desire to yield subjection to the Word and Spirit of God alone are convicted of being rebels against proper authority, and sure to end in confusion and (as some have said) in "atoms"! Yet faith will follow where God leads, owning indeed that in His path all will be confusion that is not subjection; and that, leave Him out, we at least have no resource. Let it be so. We will abide the issue.

To churches constructed after a human pattern the government appointed by God could not possibly adapt itself. The only possible one must be available for spiritual and unspiritual, believers and unbelievers alike. The world ever really says, "We do not so much as know whether there be a Holy Ghost," and counts the talk about Him as mysticism, and faith in Him as fanaticism and confusion. But faith, to be faith, must be in the unseen. In the unequal yoke of faith and unbelief, believers must descend to the level of their yoke-fellows. Unbelief cannot rise up to faith. Faith therefore must descend to unbelief. That, alas, has happened.

The effects of all this we have had before us already in some respects. The principles which have led to them are prolific in evil, but it is the principles themselves that are occupying us now. Rome, to which in this epistle we have reached, exhibits whereto the course of departure from God tended from the beginning. He who rules the course of this world has ruled it, and now it is seen clearly to be the adversary's deliberate assault upon the truth of God. The rejection of Christ by the world, he has made us forget, in the world's embraces; the cross he has changed from an inward discipline to an outward ornament; for the dishonored Spirit he has substituted hierarchical dignities; for the coming of the Lord, an ecclesiastical millennium. Thank God, though the tide runs strong, there is yet an overcoming possible; and the Lord's closing words here remind us of it. Let us keep

them in our hearts. "And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of My Father; and I will give him the morning star."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

LECTURE VI

 SLEEPING AMONG THE DEAD
 (Rev. iii. 1-6)

IN the address to the church of Thyatira, we find the Lord announcing His coming, and bidding His saints wait to share then with Him the authority which the false Church was assuming to have already. Thus Thyatira presents us with a phase of things which goes on at least until the Lord comes for His saints; not, indeed, until the rising of the Sun of Righteousness upon the world, of which Malachi speaks, but until He comes as the Morning Star—the herald of the day before the day appears.

In Sardis we have, therefore, not only a development of the Thyatira condition, but in many respects, as it is easy to see, what is in entire opposuon to it; not the claim of infallibility, not corruption of doctrine (as what is prominent), not persecution of the saints, not the exercise of authority in the same sense. There is now a very simple and explicit statement as to the character of things, which is a lack of spiritual power, nay, of life itself. While Christ had as much as ever “the seven spirits of God,”—the plenitude of the Spirit as of old, and for His people,—in fact, they whom He addressed had a name to live only, and were dead. I would only there were more difficulty in applying this; but it is surely what fatally characterizes, and did from the beginning characterize, not individuals necessarily, but the churches of the Reformation.

Understand me well. I do not speak of the Reformation itself when I say this; for the Reformation was the blessed work of God; and the Lord does not judge, or ever can have need to judge, His own work. He refers to what His grace had done for them, to what they had heard and received. Their responsibility was to take heed to it, and hold it fast; and already they had failed in this. This is the ground of judgment.

Christ has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars. So He is represented here. There is no failure in the supply of spiritual power; no failure in His care for His people. Yet in them there is a strange and terrible lack. With more pretension than had before been manifested in one way, for they have now a name to live, a name assumed to be in the book of life, while the actual condition of the mass is that of death—not feebleness, but death.

There are exceptions: not merely those alive, but, still more, those that have not defiled their garments; and of these the Lord speaks in the warmest terms of praise: "They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." Alas, it is only "a few names." Others may be alive; but in a scene of death—you know what defilement with the dead is among the symbols of the Old Testament—the many of those even alive are defiled. But the mass are dead altogether—dead with a name to live.

The Lord further refers to this in His promise to the overcomer in Sardis: "Him that overcometh . . . I will not blot his name out of the book of life." The book of life is understood by the majority of people to be only in the Lord's hands, and all the names written in it by Himself. Those ignorant of the gospel consequently stumble over this blotting out of the book of life, supposing that it is the blotting out of those who had once been saved. But there is no such thought here. There is not the

slightest sign that those mentioned ever had life at all: they had a name to live—only the name.

Contrariwise you find in Rev. xiii. 8 the very opposite as to those “written,” as we ought to read it, “from the foundation of the world in the book of the Lamb slain.” It is their security from being deceived by and worshipping the beast. Sovereign grace is their only and their sufficient security. Here, on the other hand, the book has got into man’s hand, and he writes names as he pleases. But the Lord in His own time corrects the book, and then He blots out the names of those who had *but* the name.

Now the “name to live” has special meaning in connection with Reformation times. It was, and is, in no wise characteristic of Popery, the putting of people’s names (while here on earth) into the book of life. “Saints” for them are the dead, and not the living. The living she warns that “no man knows whether he is worthy of favor or hatred,” and that it is best not to be too sure. Her pardons, her indulgences, her sacraments, only show by their very multiplicity how difficult a thing salvation is. Darkness is the essence of her system, and she thrives upon it.

On the other hand, the Reformation recovered the blessed gospel, and the word of reconciliation was preached with no uncertain sound. The doctrine of assurance was preached with the utmost energy, and was stigmatized by the Council of Trent as the “vain confidence of the heretics.” They even pushed it to an extreme, maintaining (at least, some of the most prominent Reformers did) that assurance was of the very essence of saving faith itself, and that unless a man knew himself forgiven, he might be sure that he was *not* forgiven. Plainly, then, Protestantism put a man’s name in the book of life in a way that Popery did not.

Two immense things the Reformation gave to us, which

have never since been wholly lost: an open Bible, in a language to be understood; and, on the other hand, the gospel, at least in some of its most essential features. These are inestimable blessings, which, would we had but hearts to value more.

Of the men, too, who were the dear and honored instruments in handing them down to us, we cannot speak with enough affection and esteem. God honored them (how many!), taking them to Himself in fiery chariots, from which their voices come, thrilling us with the accent of the heaven opening to receive them. Those who disparage them will have to hear, one day, their names confessed and honored by Him they served, as those of whom the world was not worthy.

But, on the other hand, we must not make, as many are doing, the Reformation the measure of divine truth. They are not loyal to the Reformation really who accept less than Scripture as their measure, or test, of this. The broken and conflicting voices which are heard the moment the question is no longer of the gospel, but of the Church and its government, assure us that if Scripture has spoken as to this, the churches of the Reformation do not in this convey to us its utterance, as it did in the gospel. Lutheranism is not Calvinism, the Church of England is not the Church of Geneva here. We must needs, whether we will or not, take Scripture to decide, amid claims so conflicting; and when we do so, we find, with no great difficulty, that no one of these takes us back to the Church as it was at the beginning—the body of Christ, or the House of living stones—at all.

Instead of this, as is well known, the churches of the Reformation were essentially national churches—not in every country able to attain the full ideal, as in France, where Rome retained its ascendancy by such cruel means, but still always of that pattern. Rome had, of course, prepared the way for this. The nations of

Europe were already professedly Christian nations, and it was not to be expected that those who escaped from Jezebel's tyranny would give up their long hereditary claim to Christianity. The adoption of an evangelical creed could not change the reality of what they were. True, they learned the formula, put their names upon the Church-books as Protestants, learned to battle fiercely for the gospel of peace,—and how could you deny their title to be Christians? Yet as to the many, it was but “a name to live.”

We must learn to distinguish two elements in the ecclesiastical revolution of those times. There was, first of all, a most mighty and manifest work of God. The Scriptures, released from their imprisonment in a foreign tongue, began to speak to responsive human hearts, with the decision and persuasiveness that the word of God alone can have. Christ began once more to teach as One having authority, and not as the scribes. The blessed doctrine of justification by faith, everywhere brought souls, held fast in bondage, into liberty and the knowledge of a Saviour-God. The ecclesiastical yoke could not longer hold those whom the truth had freed: and where Christ had become thus the soul's rightful Lord, Rome's authority was but the tyranny of Antichrist.

This was the first and most powerful element in Protestantism; not a political movement, but a movement of faith. Luther, solitary, at Worms, in the presence of the mightiest political power in Europe, was God's testimony that the work was of Him: His strength was manifest in human weakness. Had that place of weakness been retained all through, had but God been allowed to show that power was His alone, how different would have been the result! And it is due to the foremost name of Protestantism to acknowledge that, as far as carnal weapons were concerned, Luther would have rightly refused them

a place in a warfare which was God's. To call Protestantism essentially a political movement, is to do it glaring injustice, and contradict the plainest facts.

Yet we cannot ignore the political element which soon entered into it. Rome had made the nations everywhere feel the iron hand of her despotism, and the national reaction against her was the natural result of her intolerable and insolent oppression. The notorious wickedness of her chiefs had destroyed, long ago, all real respect. Her power stood now in an excessive and degrading superstition. She lived upon men's vices and their fears; and where the light fell and removed the darkness, the fears were removed also, if the vices were not. Men learned to look upon the power they had cringed to with contrary feelings, deep in proportion to their depth before. Their interests, politically and otherwise, coincided with the spiritual movement which divine power had produced. Soldiers, politicians, governments, made common cause with the men of faith. It was hard not to welcome such apparently God-sent allies, when on every side persecution raged. The movement increased in external power and importance; but its character was in just that proportion lowered and perverted.

There was need of defined principles to give cohesion to elements which the Spirit of God no longer sufficed to bind together. Outside there was the pressure of Rome, a compact and immensely powerful body, armed, drilled, and intensely hostile. Organization was soon a necessity: but of what, or whom? To have proclaimed the true Church would have been to cast off their allies, to insure the continuance of persecution and reproach, to leave Rome unchecked, triumphant. I do not say that the true thought of the Church ever dawned upon them; but I do say that their alliance with the world was a sure means of hindering their seeing it. Instead of keeping the true Church's place, national churches were formed,

with evangelical creeds as pieces of statecraft, and political power to back them—not divine.

Of these creeds we have already spoken a good deal, but yet there remains much more to say. It is easy to see that if a creed had been of necessity for His Church, the wisdom of God could have easily given us an infallible one, and His love could not have failed to do so. On the contrary, He has given us that which He proclaims able to furnish the man of God thoroughly to all good works, but which people feel at once to be as different from a creed as can be.

Why do people want a creed? They want something which can be more plainly and easily read than Scripture. Scripture is indefinite; a creed must be definite. Of Scripture everybody makes what he likes; what they want is something different, something that shall not be susceptible of two meanings, plain to all—spiritual and unspiritual, Church and world alike.

I have before been contending that Scripture is clearer, plainer really, than any word of man—besides being in infinite wisdom written so as to meet, as nothing else can, the thoughts of man at every point, so as to be the only guard and protection against heresy to the end of time. This is simple truth; yet I am going to own, what may seem a contradiction to my former words, that from their own point of view there is some truth in what they contend for as between Scripture and a creed.

From their point of view,—for the apostle's words limit us somewhat when we speak of the intelligibility of Scripture. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that"—what? "THE MAN OF GOD may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Scripture, profitable for doctrine as it is, *does* need a state of soul for its proper apprehension. It needs not, indeed, great attainments, human learning,

deep research, but (what may be found in the lowest and poorest just as well) *devotedness*—that we be God's men: what all Christians are, indeed, by position and profession, but, alas, not what all practically are. *This* is the single eye which we must have for the body to be full of light.

But this being so, we can easily see that the Bible is not just the book for a court of law, and it is not the book for a national creed. The truth in it is not meant to be accessible merely to the natural mind. It is not crystalized into so many doctrines; and if it is not, if it is so essentially unlike a creed, on that very account we may surely believe that nothing like a creed was in God's design. He did not mean to give something that should serve as a motto for political partizanship, or a banner which should serve for any other purpose than spiritual warfare. Nationalism, the union of the living and the dead, was never in His mind. He meant spirituality to be a first necessity for the discernment of His thoughts; and men, when they reject the blessed word of God for their plainer creed, show really that herein they are at cross purposes with Him.

“Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” is the exact moral description, as it is the condemnation, of nationalism: of more than this, no doubt, but still of this. It is not the Church of God at all, but a Christianized world with Christians scattered through it—a place so defiling that but a few really keep their garments undefiled. Connected with the truth, as Popery is not, such a system betrays the truth which it professedly upholds. The character of the last days is developed by it: “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, proud, blasphemers,” retaining all that was natural to them under the garb of Christianity, “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”

This is the effect of popularized truth—popularized as

God never meant His truth to be. Of course you will distinguish between this and the *preaching* of His truth, than which nothing is more assuredly according to His mind. His gospel is to go forth to every creature, and the blessings of an open Bible we shall not be apt to exaggerate. But by *popularized* truth I mean what we have already been speaking of, truth made into a party badge so as to be accepted by those with whom Christ is not; for He never was popular, and He is not.

Popularized truth means truth that has lost its power. It may be truth for which martyrs died, truth that when first given of God, or given afresh, was full of quickening power. Popularized, it is so far lifeless—no exercise of soul in receiving it, no cross in professing it. They have got from their fathers what their fathers got from God; their fathers confessed it in shame; to them it is honor. There is nothing to test conscience, nothing to make them ask, Dare I take this without human sanction to commend, nay, in the face of all human discountenance? Yet only thus have we got it truly from God. The martyrs they talk of, took it thus, and suffered for it; they take it from their fathers,—a principle which would have condemned the martyrs,—and they take it without the least thought of *being* martyrs. Truth is proclaimed as powerless by the unholy lives of its professors, while unholiness is recommended by the practice of those who are orthodox as to the truth. And thus truth tends to die out of itself, as valueless, remaining all the while in the national creed, embalmed as a memorial of the past. “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”

Too manifestly do we see this, with regard to all the national systems, to need more than a bare allusion. It is a system adapted to worldly minds, and to be worked by political machinery. The word of God is no

necessity to it, except it may be to furnish a table of lessons, for the *authoritative* standard is the creed. The Spirit of God is not necessary to it, for colleges can manufacture preachers, and ecclesiastics ordain and send them forth apart from this. Christians are not necessary to it: they are too uncertain a constituent part of a nation or its government to be capable of being reckoned on; and there is no means of determining with certainty who they are. A sacrament—baptism or the Lord's Supper—takes here the place of less manageable tests.

And the grieved and insulted Spirit may be besought to breathe upon the lifeless mass, and fill the sails of the ship of the state. But He must keep within the bounds prescribed by ritual, hierarchy, and parliament, or He will be treated as schismatical. And, it may be remarked, how often, in fact, a schism springs out of a large and manifest revival. Souls brought near to God, and made to feel the value of His Word, and the necessity of obedience to it, are not made thereby the mere docile servants of the state-religion. The new wine will not be held in the old bottles. Statesmen are thus not favorable to such fresh enthusiasm, and no wonder: it divides the house which it is their interest to keep as one.

But is not this the history of the churches of the Reformation, of Protestantism in fact, during the three centuries of its existence? Is not this the true account of its divisions, for which it is reproached? The Spirit of God is not, indeed, the author of confusion, but of peace; of unity, and not disunion. But when people talk of schism, they should remember to what that term applies. As found in Scripture, it is "schism in the *body*" that is reprobated, and the body of Christ is not a national church. When men have joined together the living and the dead, when they have subjugated consciences to formularies instead of Scripture, to hierarchies instead of

God, or to hierarchies in the name of God, what have they forced the blessed Spirit to do but to draw afresh the line they have obliterated between the living and the dead, between man's word and God's, between human authority and divine?

And His mode of doing this has been constantly to bring out of the inexhaustible treasure of His Word some fresh or forgotten truth, which would do that which the popularized truth in the creed had almost ceased to do, and which would test the souls of His people as to whether they were indeed the descendants of those who confessed Him of old, whose tombs they built, and whose memories they had in honor. The fresh truth calls for fresh confession; it costs, and is meant to cost something; it brings its confessors into opposition to the course around them, and separates them at once from those whose only desire is to go with the stream, and with whom the profession of Christ and the Cross are widely separate.

Doubtless the division may separate between true Christians themselves; and this is in itself an evil, that true Christians should be separated; but the responsibility rests with those who are not quick-eared enough to hear God's call when it comes; not single-eyed enough to discern the path in which the Lord is leading His own. We are bound by the honor we owe to Him to maintain that He cannot possibly be leading His own in contradictory paths, cannot possibly refuse the needed light to walk aright, however simple or ignorant the soul may be. No one strays, and no one stumbles, because God denies him light. But "the light of the body," practically, "is the eye"—the inlet of it; and there the hindrance is. Thus a severance, sorrowfully enough, is made between real Christians; but the sin of it is *not* with those who separate from that which God has shown them to be evil, but with those who remain associated with the evil which

is forcing out the true in heart. Separation from evil, so far from being a principle of division, would, if honestly followed, make for unity and peace, as leading upon a path where God's Spirit ungrieved could really unite and strengthen His people. With evil He cannot unite; evil, therefore, wherever admitted, is a principle of division.

I am not, therefore, upholding or making light of schism. The divisions of Protestantism are its shame; and to glory in them is to glory in one's shame. Error is manifold, contradictory, schismatic. Truth, however many-sided, is but one. Sects, in their multiplicity, may accommodate, no doubt, the religious tastes of man; but that only would show how purely human they are, how little divine.

The unity of the Spirit may be maintained, and allow indeed for growth in knowledge, and in unity of judgment as to many things. The Church of God has room for all that are God's, of whatever stature—fathers, young men, and babes. Nay, it insists upon the largest charity for those who differ from us in aught that would not link the name of Christ with His dishonor. But that is a very different thing from what is implied in a creed; indeed, I may say, is its fundamental opposite. For the creed defines in a way that, if rigidly adhered to, *shuts out* toleration as to points of confessedly minor importance, where the Spirit of God would teach, not indifference, indeed, but the largest charity; the creed forces its definitions upon all in a way *most* felt by the *most* conscientious. It is as necessary, as far as the creed goes, to believe in a child's being regenerate when baptized as it is to believe in the Son of God Himself. I grant there may be practical laxity, but for a soul before God that does not do. For such an one, with his eyes open, the subjection to human institutions in the things of God is just what he cannot and dare not yield.

“Making schism in the body” is always wrong. Separation

tion from evil at all costs is a necessity, and always right: and from this have been gathered the freshness and power which have plainly characterized so many movements of this kind at the beginning. They began in self-judgment and devotedness. The evil at least they saw, and were exercised about, and the measure of truth they had was held in power. It soon became systematized, and in that proportion its power began to fail. The founders, if you look at their lives, were men of faith and power, suffering and enduring. The manners of the adherents were chastened, simple, primitive. When organized, popularized, with a large following, its freshness waned; and in the third or fourth generation it had taken its place as simply another sect among the many, boasting of a history which it did not discern to be a satire upon its present condition.

The organization, the creed, are to preserve the truth. But did these give them the truth they are anxious to preserve? Surely not, as they must own. God in His love, God in His power, has given what man had proved his incompetency to retain; they cannot trust Him to retain it for them after He has given it. He has used His word to minister it; they turn around and use for that blessed Word of His a creed of their own manufacture to preserve it. The generations after follow their fathers' creed and not the Word. The truth popularized is gone as "spirit and life." God has to work afresh and outside of what a little while ago was a fresh revival produced by His Spirit.

And the spiritual life of the time has come more and more to manifest itself in "revivals," which, so far as they are really such, are the protests of the Spirit of God against prevailing death continually creeping over everything, and oftentimes connected with fresh statements of truth when the old have lost their power. The Lord's warning to Sardis points out this constant tendency to

death: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die." "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent."

It is scarcely too much to say that every true revival, whatever the blessing for individuals,—nay, I might even say, in proportion to the blessing for individuals,—weakens the national system, and this for reasons we have been considering. The Spirit of God must needs work in opposition to the death produced by the system, and therefore against the system which produces the death. Souls quickened by the Spirit of God cannot go on contentedly under deadly and unchristian teaching, comforting themselves with the assurance of the article that "the evil" who sometimes "have chief authority in the ministration of the Word and sacraments," do yet "minister by Christ's commission and authority;" nor will they always be able to accept the ecclesiastical "yoke with unbelievers," because the system requires "every parishioner" to communicate, irrespective of any other security as to his conversion than his baptism and confirmation may imply.

It will be no marvel, then, to find (what any one with spiritual understanding must own) that a large proportion of those who "have not defiled their garments," in the history of Protestantism, have been in some way or other dissenters from the national system. The first generation of English reformers were dissenters from Rome, and Rome did her best to keep them pure by the fires she kindled for them. Afterwards a people began to be separated, who, from their honest endeavor to be right with God, were nicknamed "Puritans." I need not tell you what great names are found among this class, which after-generations have learnt to love and honor—a class with whom fine and pillory and imprisonment were familiar things. Everybody knows that Bedford jail was **the**

“den” in which John Bunyan dreamed his memorable dream. In Scotland, the attempted enforcement of prelacy gave a succession of martyrs and confessors to the Presbyterian name, with whom, as elsewhere, their time of persecution was their time of real blessing, while Episcopalianism, which was riding roughshod over them, had gone already more than half way back to Rome. With the movement under Wesley and Whitefield, nearer to our own times, we are naturally still more familiar; and that which issued in the Free Church of Scotland is still within the memory of a generation not yet passed away.

All these, and many others, will exemplify the truth of what I have been saying, until in our own days the national systems are showing evident signs of decrepitude, and breaking up, and Romanists and infidels are beginning their pæans on the downfall of Protestantism. We who are able to see it all in the light of Scripture can easily understand why all this is, and see only the truth of God’s word more and more manifested in it. Christianity flung as a cloak over a corpse can surely not warm it into life. Corruption will go un underneath, eating away the form of life—the only thing it ever had—until at last the cloak will more or less fall off, and what was all along true become apparent.

When the Protestant churches shall be gone altogether, or gone as such, their protest will not be gone, but only transferred to another Court. Heaven will take up what they have dropped. Babylon the great will fall under divine judgment, and apostles and prophets, and God’s people everywhere, will rejoice at her fall.

But let us contemplate a little while now the other side of things. We have had before us to-night what is intensely sorrowful, more provocative of tears than Jezebel’s corruption. There, the very malignity of the evil roused the whole soul against it. Here, there is the fruit of what

was in the beginning a movement of God. He can speak of what they had seen and heard, and exhort to hold it fast. There are still "things that remain," although "ready to die." And how can we but sorrow intensely over what was so fair in its earliest promise, and received its baptism in the blood of martyrs?

Yet the word to the overcomer here comforts us with its recurrence. It links us, if we have ears to hear, with the same little remnant that has ever been finding its way, through storm and flood, to Him from whose love neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword can separate, and in which they have approved themselves, through Him, more than conquerors. The overcoming may be now in a new sphere, and separation may have to be from brethren, heirs of great names in faith's record. Yet, only *overcomers* are their true successors. Not those who built the sepulchres of the prophets represented them or were linked with them, in our Lord's account, but those whom He sent forth—to be persecuted by these same admirers of antiquity.

And God must teach us independence even of one another,—that rightful independence which springs from real and lowly dependence upon Him. In His presence, what were even the greatest of His followers? How can I say to another, "Rabbi, Rabbi," when I must take the honor from Him that I deck another with? If I had not Him, it were lowness; if I have Him, it is dishonor to Him.

It is not schism, this separate path, when not my own will, but His Word and Spirit leads me. It is not separation in heart from brethren, if Christ be dearer to me still than they. Nay, love to them only approves itself, as the apostle teaches us, "when we love God and keep His commandments" (1 John v. 2). Faith's victories are not in applause wrung from a multitude, but in the path

of One, the true Joseph, separated from His brethren ; and God has overruled the presence of evil (which, I need not say, He has not caused) to the giving us a path, at least in its circumstances, the more Christlike. We are not left to the subjection to evil; He calls us to rise above it. The difficulties of the path are only to prove afresh the power of God to carry us through them all. Every encouragement throughout these epistles is held out simply to the overcomer.

The Lord give us only the needed energy! The time is short. The end is at hand. The grace that is now sufficient for all daily need will soon be manifested in the crowning of the conquerors. Then, those that are poor shall have the kingdom; the mourners shall be comforted; the meek shall have the inheritance; those that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled; above all, the pure in heart shall see God—the God whom sin, for the time, has banished from the earth He made.

LECTURE VII

 CHRIST'S WORD AND HIS NAME
 (Rev. iii. 7-13)

WE have much before us to-night, which I shall do poor justice to in the short time before me. But there are some prominent characteristics of the state of things to which this epistle addresses itself which I wish to bring before you. I do not intend to go into many details, but merely to apply certain prominent points, in this address.

This epistle has a different character from any former one. The Lord speaks of Himself in a very distinct way from that in which He spoke of Himself before. It is not anything external, but what He is Himself, the Holy and True One. The way the Lord presents Himself in these epistles is always in accordance with the state of those to whom He speaks. It is for warning or encouragement, or perhaps both, as in the address to Smyrna: "He that liveth and was dead," enforced by the words, "Be *thou* faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." Here, "He that is holy, and he that is true" is a solemn admonition, and yet it surely has its blessed comfort too.

This personal title, in conjunction with the whole epistle, seems to show the final break-up of ecclesiasticism, and an individual walk becoming the whole matter. Holiness and truth have seldom been the attributes of bodies of men, even where professedly Christian. Not long was it even in the apostles' time before one of these could say, "All seek their own, not the things of Jesus

Christ." Pentecost has never returned. And now, having followed the development of Christendom at large from Ephesus to Thyatira, and having seen the truth given again of God dying out in the national systems of Protestantism, (in Sardis), in Philadelphia we find a strictly remnant testimony; the Holy and the True speaking of that which has seldom characterized more than individuals, and which challenges our response as individuals to it.

It is comparatively easy to point out Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, but who shall point out Philadelphia? Can you decide it in your favor by the fact that you belong to this or that company of people,—in this or that ecclesiastical relationship? Is this all that is intended by keeping Christ's word and not denying His name? I am not at all denying that the question of our associations is one of grave importance, and rightly finds a place in connection with these things. A place it must have, and a serious one, for he must purge himself from vessels to dishonor, who would himself be a vessel unto honor; and Christ's word defines our Church-place, as all else. But to take a part for the whole would be a grave mistake, and even to give an undue place to such a part.

It is more than doubtful, then, if any body of Christians as a whole can possibly represent Philadelphia as a whole. It is quite certain that, in order to do so, it would have to be in a better condition far than was the Church already in the days when apostles were yet upon the earth. No: the more Philadelphia represents a condition which has in a remarkable way the Lord's own approval, the more does it become us to see well whether that condition is our own or not.

Let us look a little then at what we have here in its prominent features.

They have but a little power: no very great works

characterize them. Three things however do, to which the Lord evidently attaches great importance.

First: "thou hast kept My word."

Secondly: "and hast not denied My name."

Thirdly: "thou hast kept the word of My patience."

And first, it is "My word," in opposition to all other. Everywhere through the epistle, as you cannot fail to see, this "My" is remarkably emphasized, and the Person of the Lord exceeding prominent. It may remind us how He has been bringing out in these latter days the truth as to Himself. Not alone the effect of His work, the power of His blood to cleanse and reconcile, but what He personally is who has done all for us. Especially has He been teaching us to look into the inner sanctuary into which He is gone, and to recognize Him more simply and really for what He is, true Man, as true a Man as ever, as well as God over all, blessed forever. I think none can doubt, who know what God has been doing for us in His grace for some time past, that the Lord Jesus has been fixing the eyes of His people more intently upon Himself, and inviting us to nearer intimacy. For how many the thought of Christ where He is now, was dimmed by the very glories of the Godhead into which He was thought to have gone back—scarcely any longer to be thought of as a Man at all! And to how many has the thought of a Man—true Man, in the very glory of God, and there as representative of His people, brought Christ into a distinctness and intimacy which is now the life of all their joy.

This vividly personal mode of address is no less strikingly appropriate to our day than it is in itself precious and inspiring. And is it not also a further mark of *remnant times*? He whom men cast out of the synagogue because he could not but confess that Divine power had opened his eyes, and because he would not dishonor—little as he knew of Him—the One in whom that power

had displayed itself, was but cast out to learn in Jesus' presence the glory of the Son of God, and to take his place among the sheep of the true Shepherd. And in proportion as we prove the breaking up of everything,—the ruin, not merely of the world as such, but the *religious* ruin—do we not find (if it be real) the presence of the Lord, all the more real, meeting all our need? And then, as we prove this, "His Word" has a place with us correspondingly. *His* Word, because it is *His*,—inherently sweet, no doubt, yet not only because it is sweet: His Word, in opposition to all else.

And, beloved friends, if we look around us at the present day, which of us can be ignorant that it is the word of God that is in special question everywhere. The two great parties of this day, the party of superstition on the one hand, and of infidelity on the other, however they may seem to be essentially opposed, yet unite in the attempt to lower and take away the authority of His Word as such. Will Rome allow consciences to be simply before God, and in subjection to Scripture? So far from that, you are to receive her infallible interpretation of it and not listen to it for yourself at all. And all ritualism, however diluted, runs in the same direction. The voice of the Church is substituted for Christ's voice, and the Church herself presses in between you and Him: there is to be distance, not intimacy. On the other hand, infidelity (which you will find, in a form still more variously diluted, where you least suspect it) will not allow God's voice to speak to you in any real way at all. Religion is an earth-born thing—not heaven-born; an *aspiration* perhaps, but not an *inspiration*; a seeking after God, not God after you; and a seeking which they are now determining to be a fond vain thing, for God is the Unknowable, and even the conception of Theism is "unthinkable."

On the other side, God has been bringing out for us in

the most wonderful way the fulness of His Word. I do not at all speak of external evidences, although in every self-chosen path by which man is seeking to escape from God, He has been meeting and confronting him with these. Stones have been crying out in Egypt, and bricks in Assyria. The disentombed memorials of the long dead past have proclaimed Him then living, who still and ever liveth. But I speak of that in which His Word has witnessed for itself, as the innermost shrine of His presence in which every voice speaks of His glory. That Word which to unbelief is so poor and common and gives no response, has never to faith been so revealing God, since apostles and prophets spoke it first. Christ, mute in the judgment-hall and before His accusers, has never so manifested Himself before in the midst of His own. Thus a true and faithful God has been providing for the need of His people in the days which are coming, which even now are come, when nothing else remains to us; when, if we cannot take His Word and rest in it, no other rest is possible at all.

You may understand then what an immense thing it is to be keepers of Christ's Word. Let us remark now also, that it is not merely *words* of His, but His *Word*, His Word as a whole. It has become a common fashion to say that Scripture *contains* God's word, not *is* it. Thus we are left to pick out, in the best manner we may, whatever is really His, from that which may be merely the mistake of the writer. Thus the Word ceases to have authority over us; instead of its judging us, we become its judges. We obey it when obedience coincides with our own inclinations and when we do not find it so, our excuse is at hand.

We can easily discern the folly and the sin of this; but we must remember, beloved friends, how we may really be acting secretly in such a way as this, without having any formal theory at all about it. Practically we

may be making our Bible a mere collection of favorite texts, and ignoring those we have no fancy for, as if they were not inspired by the same authority. Are there none who have a very real disrelish for practical homely precepts, who get on excellently with the highest doctrines? Let us understand then clearly, that keeping Christ's Word means surely, if it means anything, honest subjection to the whole of it: to that of which even we may not perceive the importance, as if we did; calling nothing little of what He enjoins,—of what has equal authority to emphasize it.

We have need to remember, too, that our own contrary wills are often the most effectual hindrances to receiving what is really Christ's Word. How solemn it is to think that of the mass of things in which we differ from each other as Christians, this contrariety must needs account for very much the larger part. The Lord's words are plain enough, and universally applicable, that "if any one will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." It is due to Him, surely, to own that our differences are due to ourselves and not to Him. But then these differences, found in so many whom we must esteem as really godly men, what a warning they give us of how much that is not of God may be even in the godliest. So far as we have indeed whole-heartedly followed Him, who can doubt that He has led us right! But then how little really unreserved following there must be!

And it is not hard to see that such is indeed the case,—that a mass of His own (ignorantly perhaps, but then self-blinded) are really following "words" of His, rather than as a whole His "Word." Nay, many seem to have come deliberately to a stand, where to go further would cost them (they think) too much. They do not realize that it costs them really more to proffer Him a compromise He cannot accept; that it costs the brightness

and freshness of their lives now, and what hereafter He alone knows. How many are trying to make up for this by the excitement of work for Him, and almost persuading themselves that "to obey is" *not* "better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams."

I say again, do not decide it by ecclesiastical position; do not in fact draw the line anywhere; do not think it means you are this side of any line. Is your face—are our faces—still ever onward after Him, who rests not till He has us where His heart can rest with us? How plainly perceptible it is, when a soul thus stops! Though the working may go on, and the whole outside be no other than it was, there is something gone that one in fellowship with God will at once feel hindering fellowship. Beloved brethren, how sorrowful it is to lose one another's company in this way! But if we lose Christ's, what shall replace it?

And here, again, so many in judging themselves take up with what is far below the Christian standard. Their measure is merely by what is in itself right or wrong—a legal measure. They occupy themselves with what is good, perhaps the gospel, and fancy that must be devotedness, when perhaps it is all self-invented employment and will-worship, not in His plan for them, and meant, in fact, (so treacherous are our hearts) to buy them off from true obedience.

But I must pass on to the next thing here in the Lord's commendation of the Philadelphians. The first thing is, "thou hast kept My Word": they are exemplifying a spirit of true obedience; and now it is, "thou hast not denied My name."

Names in Scripture are significant things. They are not there as in the present day put upon people for their prettiness, or because they run in the family. God did not think it an unworthy thing often Himself to interfere

and change or give a name, as we can all remember, and so the Lord with His disciples. There was a reason for the name. It was the expression of what the person was, most generally, or would be, as in Abraham, Israel, Peter, and such like; and so especially with the names of God or of Christ.

When God took the special name of Jehovah with Israel, it meant that He was going to approve Himself to them in that character, as the immutable God, the I AM, upon whom they could rely to keep the covenant. So Christ is Immanuel, "God with us," and in order that that prophecy may be, or shown to be fulfilled, He is called "Jesus," His people's Saviour from their sins. God could not be with us except our sins were met, and none but a Divine person could meet them,—salvation must be of God: and this is all expressed in that name "Jesus."

Again the name "Christ," which every one knows, is but the Greek form of the Hebrew "Messiah," speaks of Him as the One anointed of God to be the Deliverer in three necessary ways: a Prophet to bring out of error; a Priest to open the way to God; a King to govern for God.

Thus Christ's name is a remarkably explicit declaration of Himself. And this name of His, with the facts which it implies, is what is committed to His people to hold fast and maintain as His, in the midst of a world which has rejected Him. To confess His name involves thus the confession of His absolute deity; His true humanity; His salvation of His people; His being their only and sufficient Teacher, Intercessor and Lord. This we have not to "*profess*" of Him merely, but to "*confess*," for the world will not allow that He is really this. I do not forget that among us the world is even yet what is called a Christian world, but that does not alter it really. As soon as it sees that these names mean some-

thing for you, that they express truly what Christ is to you, then they will not suffer it. Their protest may be more or less polished according to the refinement of the age; it may be the protest of liberality itself against *your* narrowness: none the less you will have to suffer. Christ calls for confession ever. His people need never fear that they will have to give up the old path of suffering, consecrated by the prayers and tears of past generations of the long line of His witnesses. The world never really changes: our path through it, our struggle against it cannot change.

The name of Christ expresses then what He is: the truth of what He is, is what is committed to us, what we have to confess in the face of the world. Here is the great controversy between God and man in the present day. As in Israel the question was between Jehovah, the one true God, and the gods of the heathen; and Satan's effort then (alas, his too successful effort) was to lead the people of Jehovah into the surrounding idolatry, so now the question is as to the one Christ—for Satan's power has set up "many Antichrists."

People little realize how pre-eminently false doctrine is the work of Satan. Christ is the "Truth;" the Spirit of Christ, "the Spirit of truth;" Satan is the "liar from the beginning." By a lie of his, man was first seduced and fell. By the truth he is brought back to God, and sanctified. Satan's effort is therefore by counteracting lies to destroy the power of the truth, and his most successful method is not so much direct denial, as perversion of the truth. Knowing man's heart but too well by long experience, he knows how to combine truth and error so skillfully, that the truth shall give only the more speciousness to the error, while the error in the guise of truth shall appeal to the lusts and passion, and enlist them upon its side.

Thus Satan seduces as an angel of light, and Christen-

dom, with its profession of Christ's Lordship, can worship many lords under that profession. Not denying His name, may in this way be given as a signal mark of approbation in the midst of Christendom, even more than in the midst of heathenism.

If we look further into Scripture for the association in which we find the name of Christ, we shall soon see that it is connected with the whole standing and walk of the individual believer, as well as with the practical gathering together of His people: things which, always of primary importance, have, as thus connected, come into special prominence in the present day. We are "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus;" our prayers are to be presented in His name; our every word and work are all to be done in His name; our gathering as Christians is to be "to His name." And these things may be otherwise stated, as our identification with Christ before God, His identification with us before the world; and the objective power of what He is for us, individually or collectively. That these are things very specially in question in these days, if we are intelligent observers, we shall surely see.

Our justification in His name involves the first of these truths. It is our identification with Him before God that alone permits, and necessitates our acquittal. We are justified, as Scripture assures us, "by His blood;" He having stood for us upon the cross and died under our just sentence. But thus also, if His death is ours, His coming up from the dead is also ours; if "He was delivered for our offences," He "was raised again for our justification." His death was ours as sinners before God: we passed away in that character entirely, "our old man," all that we were as children of fallen Adam, being "crucified with Christ." His resurrection declares the fact of His acceptance in the offering of Himself for us, —declares therefore our acceptance. Our place is hence-

forth in Christ before God, identified completely with the One who as Man is entered into the heavens and set down in the presence of God for His people.

Hence the Lord could speak to His disciples, in view of the accomplishment of His work, and of His now imminent return to His Father, of prayer in His name as a new thing which would be now for the first time their privilege, when the Spirit of truth having come to lead them into all the blessed reality of the new position, they should know that He was in the Father, and He in them, and they in Him (John xiv. 20). Conscious of their gracious identification with Him on high, they were now for the first time to approach the Father as thus identified; and the answer to their prayers, however feeble these prayers, would be the testimony of Divine satisfaction with Christ and with His work.

But if His people are thus in Christ on high, He, on the other hand, is in them below; and, while identification is not the only thought in this, (for He is in us as life also and by His Spirit, and this is what empowers us for such a place), yet identification is none the less clear and certain too. If He represents us in heaven, we represent Him on earth, and this is as wonderful a privilege as it is an immense responsibility. We represent Him before the world: living His life, treading His path, learning His sorrows and tasting too His joys. Whatever we do in word or deed, we are to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. iii. 17).

And are not these truths which God has been graciously restoring to us in these days afresh, (though from the beginning in Scripture, and which characterize in a measure the spiritual movement of the time) do not they give fresh meaning to the confession of His name? No doubt the revival of "justification by faith" is as old as the Reformation, and was then brought out with simplicity and power. We have cause to thank God for it

abundantly. Yet even that had been again very much obscured by the substitution of experiences and fruits of the Spirit instead of Christ, as to be rested in. And this had deprived the doctrine itself of much of its power and blessedness. But there was one thing to which the Reformation did not attain, and of which the common evangelical doctrine, so-called, has fallen entirely short: it is this identification of the believer with Christ risen and gone in, as Man, to God.

Even the full manhood of the Lord, as a present thing in heaven, has become misty and indistinct, and the resurrection side of the gospel is nearly absent from the evangelical systems. They stop short with Christ's death for us, and use that to replace us upon earth as men in the flesh still. They count it mysticism to talk of not being in the flesh, of being dead with Christ, risen and seated in Him in the heavenly places. The righteousness they impute is obedience to the law merely, than which they say there can be nothing higher, and which, according to the system, Adam should have fulfilled.

The effect of this is, we are left in the world and of it, though forgiven and justified; we are to take our place in it and make it better, not walk outside of it. Pilgrims and strangers we are not, save in the perforce way that all the world is—time hurrying us on alike to death and an eternity beyond.

A signal proof of this is just the doctrine everywhere current, that the law is the rule of a Christian's life. To this doctrine they attach extreme importance. To deny it is, as they think, to open the flood-gates of iniquity, and preach license of the wildest sort. For they have settled it against the apostle's clear and emphatic statement, that the law is the strength of holiness, instead of being, as he affirms it, "the strength of *sin*" (1 Cor. xv. 56). The law, they say, is the "transcript of the mind of God," and therefore the same as the gospel, only a

good deal more. To speak of being "dead to" it, and "delivered from" it, they would deem profanity, if it were not that, these expressions being found in Scripture, they had decreed them to apply merely to the *ceremonial* law. But the "ceremonial law" is a theological fiction, not a Scriptural fact at all. It is not found in Scripture anywhere, but is an arbitrary invention, to escape from its plain meaning. In the very chapter from which the expressions just now cited are taken, and in direct connection with them, that law is represented as saying, "Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. vii. 7). Was this the ceremonial law? Was the ceremonial law "the strength of sin"? But my point is simply now, that when they claim the law as the rule of a Christian's life, they thereby omit from the Christian standard all that is not found in the Jewish one. The higher position of the Christian is not admitted to have any corresponding practical effect. Long life on earth is set before him as an aim and object. The heavenly position is not contemplated; and pilgrim and strangership are left out of the "rule;" for in the ten commandments, manifestly, these are not to be found.

How differently does the apostle set things before us in the last chapter of his epistle to the Galatians: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (or creation); and as many as walk according to *this rule*, peace be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God." The Christian rule is that he walk as one crucified to the world, in Christ a new creation—not a mending of the old.

Thus, as I have said, evangelicalism drops the resurrection side of the gospel, and the characteristic heavenly features of a Christian's life. God has however come

in to recall them to our attention. He is lifting our eyes up to the heavens to which He is just ready to call us home; and oh, may our hearts answer to His appeal. Remember, this must be no mere theory with us. It will not do to take this place, and spare the flesh and cultivate worldliness after all. It will not do to talk about resurrection-life without some consistent endeavor to apprehend and exemplify it. Practical results will always follow real faith, and this is as true of faith in any special truth, as it is of faith as a whole. The holy and the true One seeks for holiness and truth.

There is another thing connected with the name of Christ, as we have already seen, and you must suffer me to go on to speak of this. It was Christ's name that once linked together all His people. No other name was known amongst them. And when other names did begin to appear, the apostle's voice rebuked the dishonor put upon the One to whom alone they were baptized, who was alone their Master. Now, alas, the name of Christ is no longer a sufficient bond of union for His people. No doubt they are ready, one and all, to claim the promise of His personal presence where two or three are gathered to His name; yet, if, instead of accepting this as a matter of course, they would try and prove their title, they would find it perhaps less easy to do so than they think. Would His name gather less than all His own? Could you plead being gathered to His name, and (apart from the question of scriptural discipline) exclude His people? If His name be the truth as to what He is, as we have seen, then this will exclude all falsehood as to Christ. But for the very same reason, it will unite all true confessors of Him. If what He is unites us, we shall have to put aside all separate and separating creeds and articles, and return to simple membership of the one body of Christ.

Alas, does it seem a bold thing now to claim His

Church for Him? Well, if we may scarcely hope that she will answer to the claim, yet Christ has provided in His grace, from the very beginning, for the faith of two or three, if there were no more, who would refuse all bonds beside His name. If they have nought else they have the assurance that that faith shall not be in vain,—that He at least will be with them, whose presence is all needed sanction, and all joy.

You may perhaps turn round upon me here and ask, Do I mean to deny that Christ is with all His people, or that the Spirit of God does not work in the denominations of Christendom? And many will be ready to urge, nay, have urged again and again, that the way in which the Spirit of God works amongst these shows His sanction of them. But that is too large a conclusion. It would carry us on to the conviction that Romanism itself was sanctioned of Him. Who can deny that God worked by such an one as Martin Boos? He worked, and worked largely; and we can surely own it fully, and bless His name for it, without at all supposing that His love and pity shown to souls in the midst of popery sanctions the papal system! God is sovereign in His grace, bound and limited by no restrictions. We rejoice to know that in a world of sinners He has bought Himself title to come in anywhere and save. Sin is no barrier where the Lamb of God has suffered for it. Did He want to have things right before He came in, who would be saved?

If you urge that grace, where it comes in, will tend to set things right, I answer, Of course: every soul that knows God would agree to that. But here comes in the mystery (mystery it is, to believers and to unbelievers alike), the mystery of the human will,—which, even in God's people, dares to set limits to obedience to His Word, aye, and can cover these up with flowers, as necessary fences and safeguards to holiness.

I fully allow that everywhere God's Spirit works, and

works for good; but everywhere, alas, man's will works too. Let us not confound these. None can "be as God's mouth" who do not learn, with Jeremiah, to "take forth the precious from the vile." The mingling of such things together is not of God; but much that *is* of God is yet so mingled.

Yes, the working of God's Spirit is like that to which the Lord compares it, "the wind" that "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth." And God's grace is to the chief of sinners unrestricted grace. We must not take these as putting sanction on the circumstances amid which they work. We must not judge of the latter but by the Word which God has given us for perfect guidance. And we must not propose to follow Him in His workings necessarily, for this is beyond us, to do as He does; and, as has been truly said by others, "He is the Sovereign, and we are the servants," and the servant must only do what he is bidden.

Most fully then can we allow that God works among denominations, without in the least conceding that denominations are of Him, or that He is with them *as such*. I have already declared also my conviction, that in the beginning of many of these He was with—fully with—those whose consciences forced them into separation from some evil, which He had made them realize as such. But that proves nothing as to the denomination itself. Who indeed can read the apostle's challenge of the first entry of the thing at Corinth, and honestly maintain that God approves of it? Or that all that he forbade was their wrangling about it, but that when that wrangling had come to a division, then it would be all right? That would be to forbid a tree to have blossoms, whose fruit nevertheless might be acceptable enough.

We can fully maintain, then, God's universal grace. We can believe and rejoice in the unrestrained working of His blessed Spirit. We can do more than this: we can allow that Christ is with every individual Christian according to His promise: a promise *realized* indeed by these in proportion to the simplicity of their faith in Him, a faith whose fruit is found in the works which surely come of it. Our Lord's promise is clear, but in terms it is well to recall precisely, while we think of it. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him." And again: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him" (Jno. xiv. 21-23).

God forbid that we should deny these blessed words, or attempt in any wise to limit them arbitrarily, or indeed to limit them at all. The words apply to the individual, and to the individual alone: that is clear. And it should be clear that the Lord's promise to two or three gathered to His name is a promise additional to this, and outside of it. It is a sanction, not of individual state, as that in John is, but of a gathering as gathered to Him; a sanction connected not only with the hearing of prayer, but with binding and loosing by the assembly—with assembly acts, which no individual merely, or mere set of individuals, have power for.

For the assembly, if practically but only two or three of those gathered to His name, is thereby prevented being a mere clique or private party, met to accomplish merely personal ends. Its door must be open for all that are Christ's, confessing truly His blessed name; and then He can be there to give efficacy and authority to that which is not the aim of a faction or a self-isolated party, but of His own gathered as His own,—as far as

their will and aim can accomplish it, in unity with **all** His that are in practical fellowship with Him.

We may see then the reason of this promise, and that it is no arbitrary thing. And in order that He may be able to be with us so, He has put the terms of it as low as He could put them for a gathering to be a gathering at all,—“two or three”—blessed be His name! How great the grace we have indeed cause to own, in a day of such feebleness and disunion as is the present, spite of its pretension. Nor need there be one bit of pretension on the part of those who thus gather to His name. They, above all, are called to recognize the ruin in which they themselves have had but too disastrous part, and to own (what is a continual warning against pretension) that aught but continuous lowly cleaving to the strength of Christ can keep in a path where failure from the very beginning has been found.

Thus much then as to the confession of the name of Christ. Let us mark here, before we go on to consider the third thing before us, the meaning of the name Philadelphia, a meaning which connects well with what we have had just now, both in the way of warning and of encouragement alike. Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” Not association merely, even of brothers, but brotherly *love*. So is it to be with us: love, wherever there are “brothers,” love to all the children of the Father *as* His children, but a love which consists, and only consists, with heedful maintenance of what is due to the Father. I am but repeating the apostle’s words: “This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.” Then the extent of this, and the argument for it, are given us: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.” And then the caution: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we

love God and keep His commandments: for this is the love of God that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John iv. 21; v. 1, 2).

Many are making the mistake of supposing love to be the track, so to speak, in which we are to run; whereas it is the motive force by which we run in the track. The word of God lays down the rails; and these are rightly, and necessarily rigid and narrow too, in a true sense. The Word itself tells us that the way is a "narrow way." But love takes that road alone, and never another. The apostle will not allow that anything we may think love is such. He will not allow feeling to be the test at all. Of course we shall *feel* it—that is quite true,—but it is not the *test*; man's heart is too deceitful to allow it to be such, whether it be love to our brother, or to God our Father. Man is emotional, capable of being worked upon, and of working himself up to almost any extent. And he is quite capable of perilous mis-judgment of himself in that very way. I am not at all speaking of hypocrisy, (although I do not say there is not danger of that too), but of the way things may affect us powerfully, as it would seem, and yet superficially. This emotional feeling is no guarantee as to our true condition, any more than the waves driven by the wind against an ocean-current are a sign of the real obliteration of the current.

But love—most God-like, when true—is that which has most imitations which are not of God. The giving all one's goods to feed the poor, the giving one's body to be burned, the apostle supposes might be all without love; therefore not adequate tests of it. I may love a child of God, and very dearly, and yet love him for many another reason than because he is a child of God. My love may be merely social; what is most Christ-like in him may be what I like least. How little indeed, if we take the apostle's characteristics of it in that thirteenth of 1 Corinthians, shall we find often of what will stand

examination: "love that seeketh not her own, that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things"!

If you will turn to the first chapter of the second of Peter, you will find that in the order of divine growth, "brotherly love" comes in a very different place from what we should naturally imagine. From "faith," the beginning of everything in us, brotherly love is the sixth stage on towards perfection, and only short of the full maturity of "love" itself. We are first of all to add to our faith "virtue," in the Roman sense of it—courage, spiritually applied. For as faith's walk is against nature, and through a hostile world, the very first requisite for it, next to faith itself, is "courage."

At the start you have to make up your mind. There must be no indecision, no half-heartedness. The obedience, which the apostle John has given us as the test of love, comes at the very beginning. Have we all even reached this first point from which alone the Philadelphian position can be attained? Are we all by God's grace unreserved in self-surrender to Him who is indeed our Master and Lord? Only after this, not before, comes "knowledge"—true knowledge—only to be acquired practically by the road, and in the field in the face of the enemy; and knowledge which immediately becomes practice as "temperance,"—government of ourselves; and "patience," in view of adverse circumstances; "endurance," holding on to that wherewith we began—not only I did "count all things but loss," but still I *do*.

Then "godliness" follows. The more positive fruits begin to appear. The truth is acting upon the one given up to follow it, self-ward, world-ward, God-ward, and now at last *brother*-ward. Think of how much it involves to be a Philadelphian, and you will see at once that no mere right position ecclesiastically will put you there. You must be devoted; you must be self-governed;

you must be enduring; you must be with God: and then, these points reached, your love to your brethren will be in orderly development, and somewhat that we can trust.

We need not marvel, however much we may deplore it, how little of this spirit is indeed to be found. But there is no remedy in mere expectancy or in lament, still less in accusation of one another on this score. The doing of this betrays the doer. It shows that "seeking not her own" is not the quality of our love, at least. If we mourned it rightly, we should be more with God about it—intercessors, not accusers. And then also, remembering that only what we *receive* we have, we should be seeking for God to minister and manifest His love to the needy and unsatisfied hearts towards Him, which this coldness of heart toward each other implies.

On the other hand, let us notice for our encouragement that from faith as a root all these fruits develop. The apostle's words infer as much as this. They are, really, "*in* your faith have also virtue, and *in* virtue, knowledge," and so on. This is as plants grow, each fresh bud developing out of the product of a former one. For faith, the root of all, lays hold on Him in whom all spiritual blessings are ours, and the spiritual growth is only by what we learn of Him. And so the apostle adds: "If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful *in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The remedy is not in moody self-occupation, and not in endeavoring to get out of ourselves what is not found there, but in more real and earnest laying hold of what is ours in Him who is for us complete satisfaction and all-sufficient power. It is a great thing to be a Philadelphian, and you will not wonder that under this title the Lord should describe a people who, with all their weakness, have His special approbation.

But here, if we look a little around us, we shall find on the one hand a divine movement stirring the hearts of God's people towards a real, practical "brotherly love" springing out of "godliness." On the other it is easy to see an imitation of this which aims at a getting together of Christians, even at a sacrifice of that which is of God. In the world too, confederacy is the order of the day. "Union," they say, "is strength." And everywhere, societies, associations, companies, amalgamations of every kind, for all sorts of purposes, are found. They are naturally largely commercial, and for such selfish ends as the world that knows not Christ is full of. They are a banding of individuals who remain really in interest individuals, not seekers of each other's good, but their own. They are neither the expression of love nor do they promote it. On the contrary it is well known that the larger they are as corporations, the less heart there is in them. They intensify the self-seeking to which they minister, and for which they provide an ampler harvest field.

The bond here is in no wise brotherhood; yet who can deny that professing Christendom is largely permeated by the same spirit, and has adopted worldly means in a worldly spirit, for ends professedly Christian? Do not mistake; do not run into the thought that these ends being worthy ones must sanctify the means employed to reach them. These combinations to produce great results, is there no ensnarement in the very thought? Are not means apt to be mistaken for ends? Is not the consciousness of strength which union promotes, and is designed to promote, the very opposite of the weakness which has need of and brings in God? Does not the publicity of action put those engaged in it before men's eyes rather than God's, and make them little content with such words as the Lord addresses here to Philadelphia, "I know thy works?" Lastly, does not the

apparent greatness of the result aimed at, induce a carelessness as to what are considered the smaller details of ways and means by which it is to be reached?

No one can deny that while the increase of sects goes on without apparent abatement, yet along with this there is a marked and decided tendency to union for all kinds of objects dear to the Christian. Missionary societies, Bible societies, Tract societies, Sunday-school Unions, Young Men's Christian Associations, and such like, ignore on the one hand what they recognize on the other, and aim to unite Christians as such, to accomplish results which the divisions of Protestantism have hindered. And in movements of this kind there is much that one can very heartily rejoice over. Who can doubt that there is working a real desire for Christian fellowship, a longing for liberty beyond the artificial limits imposed by ecclesiasticism, and a yearning for greater and better fruitfulness than the strife of sects would allow? Who can doubt also that in this way the zeal of many earnest workers has been kindled, and that much has really been, and is being, accomplished? Intolerance has been softened down; sectarian rancor mitigated; and a busy activity in evangelistic efforts especially induced, which the Lord is using for blessing to numbers of souls.

We should be sadly wanting in discernment if we did not see, and in Christian spirit if we did not rejoice over, such things as these. Nor must it be thought a contradiction to point out on the other hand results which are to be deprecated, and tendencies which are rapidly developing as the years roll by, which must be a source of trouble, if not surprise, to every one to whom

—“Anworth is not heaven,
And preaching is not Christ;”

to whom the quality of a thing, as viewed by the “Holy and the True,” is of more importance than its quantity.

Let us judge candidly and seriously of that which the coming day at least will reveal in its true character. Who that has that day before him dare rashly blame or carelessly pass over things which affect the glory and the heart of the Lord our Saviour—that heart upon which rest (as the engraved jewels on the high priest's breast-plate), the names of His beloved people, not one of them forgotten? He who has before him, what we have here, the Son of Man in the midst of the candlesticks, will be delivered from the snare of acting before other eyes than His, and will have no motive to apply other than truthfully, and in love, "what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

We have glanced at the churches of the Reformation and scarcely need to have it repeated that nationalism everywhere gives "a name to live" where there is no real life. The discipline here is of the very loosest kind. Annihilationism, Universalism, Swedenborgianism, Rationalism of the extremest kind, are in some of these systems allowed openly to manifest themselves. "Tares and wheat," they urge, "are to grow together to the harvest." "Judas was at the table of the Lord." And thus they have scriptural ground, as they imagine, for *not* "putting away from among themselves a wicked person," or "purging themselves from vessels to dishonor."

What must be, what *is*, the effect of this and such like laxity? And what the effect of bringing a large number together where even the feeble bonds of such discipline are relaxed, and members of the loosest bodies are accepted thus far by those who in their own bodies are governed by stricter and more scriptural rules? What can the effect be but the deterioration of the whole, a leavening of worldly principles and of positive false doctrine also? Are the spiritual ordinarily in a majority in these large bodies, or in a minority? Do

they lead the rest, or have they to find themselves forced to follow the lead of others, and to mix themselves up with that which they feel and own to be not as they would have it, but still tolerate for the sake of the connection with so large a machinery for good, as they esteem it?

Generally, a compromise as to the truth has to be made, which would forbid any one in these associations to do what Paul appealed to the Ephesians as having done amongst them: "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." They have to be (so far as these connections go) servants qualifying by omissions their Master's message, bound to refrain from delivering what He has put into their mouth to deliver. Oh that beloved brethren in the Lord would well consider for themselves how far this can go, without dishonor to the Lord who has bought them for His own, or without loss of real power through grieving the Spirit of power!

And are not means insensibly substituted for the end,—the registry of so many visits made, so many tracts distributed, so much ground covered, made to do duty oftentimes for that which these things are only handmaids to, if they mean anything at all? And if conversions are registered, the case is often still more sorrowful: conversions being expected as the result of so much machinery, and chronicled—oh how lightly and carelessly—to man's successful effort, rather than the praise of God!

Upon all this I do not desire to dwell longer. Examples to demonstrate the truth of it, will not be wanting to those who care to test what they do, by the one perfect standard to which we all appeal, and by which all will be exactly measured in a coming day.

With all this, I gladly own a greater seeking after communion among those that are the Lord's. Yet I press

that co-operation apart from the truth is not God's mind, nor are human and voluntary associations His method either. God's Church—not a union of churches, but a union of members with their living Head—is His association, and in this He has provided as well for the maintenance of His truth as for the true liberty of His people. If we will not take this, how can we ask Him, because He is gracious, to bless the make-shifts substituted for it? Is it "love in the truth" and "for the truth's sake," where truth is set aside or compromised, in order to be together?

Yet if you follow truth, instead of practically bringing you to unite with the many, it will separate you—isolate you—reduce practically to nothing much that now may seem great and valuable—and shut you up into a narrow path from which naturally you shrink. Does Scripture ever promise aught but a narrow path? Are weakness and nothingness hindrances or helps to trusting God? Is it any harm for faith to have exercise? and is not the power of God as competent to work by small means and individuals as by a multitude, and by machinery of the utmost power? If we do not think so, what does it show but how sadly a trust in means and machinery has displaced confidence in the living God?

Let us pass on now to consider one other thing in the attitude of these Philadelphian saints which the Lord singles out for special approbation. "Because thou hast *kept the word of My patience*, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

And what is connected with this?

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Remark, He says for the first time now, "quickly." We have not had that before. It is a sign here of how the time of His patience is coming to an end. It is now as the apostle says in the

first chapter, "The kingdom and patience of the Lord Jesus Christ." By-and-by it will be His "kingdom and glory." Now it is the time in which, though already possessing "all authority in heaven and earth," He waits, not taking His power to put down evil, but exercising that long-suffering which is unto salvation, of which each one here saved by grace is an example and a proof.

Can it be a strange thing then for us to have to keep the word of His patience? to remember *what* holds back the wheels of judgment, and delays the fulfilment of our hope as Christians? *Patience* is not indifference as to that hope, but the very opposite. Were we indifferent we should not be able to speak of or to realize patience at all: "if we *hope* for that we see not, then do we with *patience* wait for it."

Happy it is to need the exhortation to be patient thus, —because our desires laying hold of the exceeding great and precious promises, our souls are carried onwards in the current of them toward the haven which faith pictures close at hand! Need we wonder at an admonition to be "patient?" Should we not wonder if our souls could embrace that future blessedness, and have no such need? But the keeping the word of His patience is more, a good deal, than being patient ourselves. It separates the thought from repression of merely selfish longings, and elavates it into communion with Him whose waiting and whose coming forth alike are the necessary result and the display of what He is—the divine Lover and Saviour of men's souls. If He come, or if He wait, it is righteousness, love, and wisdom in Him that combine and manifest themselves.

Two things are now promised to those keeping the word of His patience: first, that He will keep them out of the hour—not out of the temptation merely, but out of the *hour* of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth;—out of the

judgment of the world ready to involve the lifeless professors of Christianity, whose hearts remain, spite of their profession, bound to earthly things; out of the trouble and sifting also which will precede the judgment at the Lord's hand when He appears.

But how shall they be kept out of a time of universal trial? That is intimated in the second promise, "I come quickly." His coming will gather His saints into safety far from every breath of the tempest to ensue. They shall be with Him, raised or changed, caught up to His blessed presence, before the trial comes; and when the world sees Him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, no saint of the present time but shall be with Him there. "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe, in that day" (2 Thess. i. 10).

And now let me ask: If this intimation of the speedy approach of the Lord marks Philadelphian times, who can for a moment doubt the coincidence with the cry which for half a century has been stirring the hearts of Christians everywhere? Nothing is more certain, be it right or be it wrong, than that there has been a widespread revival of the hope of the Lord's coming, together with an impression of its actually being very near. Even the dates which have time and again been confidently set for it, if, on the one side, they show the mistakes of prophetic interpreters, on the other, not less plainly do they show the prevailing expectation. While there have been all through a large and increasing number who have never given credit to any of these calculations, they have yet been as deeply convinced as any that the time is near at hand.

And what is **this** but itself a token of its actual nearness, according to the promise in this Philadelphian epistle? Has not the Lord been saying to them, "I come quickly?" It is easy, no doubt, to fasten upon mistakes

made by warm hearts or excited minds, in order to bring discredit upon the truth; but Scripture, which disclaims for us the knowledge of times or seasons, assures the faith of those who would be "exhorting one another so much the more as they see the day approaching."

Let us hold it fast, and let us hold it pure: free from the errors with which Satan is seeking to degrade it by association,—free from the mistakes of ignorance and fanaticism,—but also from the coldness and indifference of hearts that give little response to our Lord's words here.

I must pause here, though there is much, *much* more in this epistle. I must leave to your own meditations the sweet encouragements and promises to the overcomer, which, as often noticed, so link the believer with the One who addresses him. May we be able to take hold of them. They are ours, for faith to realize and rejoice in: that faith which not only "overcometh the world," but now in the professing Church has also to overcome. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God; and I will write upon him My new name."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

LECTURE VIII

 WHAT BRINGS THE TIME OF HIS PATIENCE TO AN END
 (Rev. iii. 14-22)

WE now come, beloved friends, the solemn close of all; and it is very striking that it comes immediately after the epistle to Philadelphia, in which more than a little gleam of light and blessing shone out. The two things are very closely connected: the blessing of the church in Philadelphia really leads us, in a sense, to the judgment of the church in Laodicea.

The great feature in the address to Laodicea is that they are lukewarm—neither cold nor hot. Surely, we may say, we have had the cold state in Sardis: death is cold enough. We have had in Philadelphia the Lord reviving things—something which we may call heat. Now the mixture of these two things produces this lukewarmness of which **He** speaks. It is not heat, as in Philadelphia; it is not cold, as in Sardis; but, so to speak, the effect of the heat is only sufficient to change the cold into lukewarm—nothing more. There has been the effect of the truth,—the truth must always have effect,—God's word never returns to Him void, without doing something, without making its mark on souls in some way. But then, it may make its mark in two ways. It may be in blessing, as God designs. Oh, surely, what He wants is blessing; but, on the other hand, if it is not received so as to become blessing, what then? It has effect still, but in increased responsibility and corresponding judgment. And if Christianity fails (for it is the history of professing Christianity that we have been looking at)—if Christianity fails, if,

when God brings forth the treasures of divine truth, yet there is no due reception, no blessing for the mass, no real revival at large is produced by it, what then? He has nothing else to do—judgment must come. He must wind up the whole state of things.

You see, if there was law and that failed, as you know it did fail (that is, of course, when men failed under it and were convicted by it, as transgressors)—if the law failed, God had something else to bring in—the precious grace of Christianity. And this He did, while nevertheless judging the apostate state of things in Judaism. Still God came in, and gave the more “precious faith” of Christianity. If *Christianity* fails now, what has He to do? what has He to bring in more? If His truth, before tried, and now re-tried (His twofold witness), is not sufficient to revive things, what then? Well, the case is just what you find in the twenty-sixth of Isaiah: “Let favor be showed to the wicked” (that is, *grace*—it is the same word)—“Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.” And what then? “When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” That is what we have here—judgment must come because grace has been refused: because it has accomplished nothing as to the world at large, He must take the rod of iron: because His Word and His Spirit have been rejected, He must come with the rod of iron to beat down opposition.

But notice what is here very striking: it is not merely that God has been giving His truth afresh and it has been refused; it has been taken, or there would be no heat in Laodicea; there would be nothing but the coldness of Sardis. There has been effect. The truth has been taken, but for what has it been taken? Alas! instead of to judge man, and to bring all his high thoughts down in the presence of God that he might be lifted up and blessed, it has been taken by man in order to exalt him-

self with it. He has thereby become "rich and increased with goods, and has need for nothing." In his own thought he is so; whereas he is really "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." That is the striking feature we have here. Christ Himself is not connected with the truth. The truth has been taken, and people flatter themselves upon having it; they are rich, and increased with goods. They have got a great deal, but have not got Christ. Christ is outside, though He stands at the door and knocks, still offering to come in; if anybody will open the door, He will come in, and sup with him, and he with Him. On the other hand, if Christ be outside the door, man can do in His absence what in His presence he could not do: he can dress himself up with the truth God has given him for another purpose—glorifying himself instead of God.

The Lord therefore presents Himself as the One, so to speak, who had done all He could, and all had failed. He is "the Amen," the faithful and true witness: *He* has not failed.

He is the "Amen." You find in the second epistle to the Corinthians, the first chapter, how the apostle speaks of the word he preached as having that character, of yea and amen: because in Christ is yea; in Christ is never yea and nay. No uncertainty or doubtfulness was there in Christ or His word; He was always simply positive "yea"—always speaking one thing, and absolutely to be depended upon. If we have only one word, it is a blessed reality given us in God's infinite love, which we may hang our souls upon for eternity, and which will never fail us. The character of Christ should stamp itself upon the Christian; Christ as seen in His Word should be exhibited in His people; but if, as here so sadly in Laodicea, they have not been faithful, nevertheless He abides faithful: He is the Amen, the "faithful and true Witness." The Church has been anything but that. He is

just about to remove the candlestick, because they are untrue and unfaithful; but the Lord has not failed, and He therefore presents Himself as one absolutely true and trustworthy. And that, we can say, is our joy and comfort in the midst of the failure of everything in the present day. His people's shortcoming is not His own. Infidelity may seek to justify itself by the failure of Christians; and even Christians, alas, are capable, in the general wreck, of almost charging it upon Himself. But no, He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself. He is the "faithful and true witness."

Again, He is "the beginning of the creation of God:" that is a most important thing. You see in all these addresses the Lord brings out that in Himself which bears upon and meets the state before Him. So here He is not only the faithful and true witness, but He is the beginning of the creation of God. The old creation, spoiled by sin, is passing away; its history is completed in God's sight, and judgment has been pronounced in the cross of Christ. Christ risen from the dead is not the mending of the old creation, but the bringing in of the new creation. In Him, risen from the dead, is all that God owns as really His, first and always in His thought, and for which the ruin of the old only prepared the way.

When the psalmist lifted up his eyes to heaven, and, in view of God's glorious handiwork there, exclaimed, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?—the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" the answer is, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." But made whom? He is speaking, not of the first man, but the second—the One in whom alone his true ideal of man is realized—the One of whom Adam the first was but the fleeting image, and even the contrast too.

Now, if that be so, just notice the remarkable words used here of the state of things in Laodicea; for it is evident that, while keeping Christ outside, they are taking

the truth He gave and dressing themselves up with it, counting themselves rich and increased with goods; that is, taking God's truth in order to build up the old creation, not the new. It is an exceedingly solemn thing to see that the very truth which God has brought out in order to judge man by is the very truth he uses for the purpose of self-gratulation. If you take the law, how has man used the law? God gave it "that every mouth might be stopped," as the apostle says, "and that all the world might become guilty before God" (Rom. iii.). How has man used it? You know he has used it to establish his own righteousness by it: instead of taking it to condemn, he has used it for the very opposite. And so, exactly, with Christianity: God has brought in the truth of the new creation, the world before Him lying under death and judgment. And yet man would take the blessed truth of Christianity and dress up the old creation with it, and patch up the world, making it better if he can. That is, alas, what he is doing on every side; and men are vaunting the success of the effort.

You know what progress people think they are making—how much better the world is; and they hope the Millennium is not far off. The gospel is going to have its effect because the churches are filled, and they have a good deal of money to send abroad, a good many Bibles for the heathen—all mere external things, which show nothing. You can buy all kinds of Bibles for so much money, but you cannot buy the Spirit of God for so much money.

No doubt God's Spirit is really and largely working, but His end and man's end are diverse thus far that, while He is converting souls to "deliver them *out of* this present evil world," man's thought is an improved world, a Christian world: the effect of which is only to amalgamate Christians and the world, and spoil the scriptural character of Christianity altogether.

But in these last days God has given many to recognize at least the truth in His Word as to this. Again He has revived the truth of the new creation, and revealed to us the practical and fruitful consequences which result from a place in Christ, where He is, in the heavens. Beloved friends, *what are we doing with this truth we recognize?* Are we talking of being in Christ, a new creation, old things passed away and all things become new, and yet clinging with all our might to what has in it all the moral elements that make up the world—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?" Rank, station, birth, riches, worldly position—what are all these to us? Whether we be high or low, or rich or poor, the question applies alike. Are these things "gain" to us? Do they count for something in our estimation? Or, the things that were "gain" to us, are they counted truthfully all "*loss for Christ?*" Are we "renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created us, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is ALL and in all?" Is this theory with us, or is it practical reality? Has the Lord any need to appeal to *us* as the One who is "the beginning of the creation of God?" If so, is not Laodiceanism with us in that proportion?

For, certain it is that, as Philadelphia sets before us that true "brotherly love" which springs from our apprehension of a relationship which we have towards one another in Christ and with God, so this fatal closing word "Laodicea" speaks of that which is the entire opposite of such apprehension. Laodicea means "*people's right,*"* not Christ's glory. It represents a claim which belongs entirely to the old creation, and not the new—a claim which sets aside the meaning of the Cross as the judgment and setting aside of the first Adam and his issue,

* From *laos* (people) and *dike* (right).

and, of course, equally ignores the blessed place which we have of grace, in Christ. But we shall have to look at this again before we close. Let us go on now with the Lord's address.

He says: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."

So then He does not accept lukewarm Laodicea as an improvement upon the coldness of Sardis. And why? Because the heat is not the heat of revival, but of declension. It is the final product of what He had given to bring about a totally different one. The failure is after repeated, exhaustive trial. It is the failure of all the highest, richest, and most wonderful truth—God's heart poured out without reserve to man, that we might know Him, enjoy Him, be at home with Him. It is the turning back of heart in the very presence of an opened heaven, to take up with the paint and tinsel of the world. Therefore He says: "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth."

This is the solemn end of professing Christendom. Of course He will not spew His own beloved people out of His mouth. He must take these first of all to Himself before He can reject the whole mass as nauseous to Him. And we have already seen in the address to Philadelphia that the Lord tells them He is coming quickly, and that He will keep them out of the hour of temptation coming upon all the world. Not merely out of the temptation,—He might hide them in the desert so,—but out of the *hour*. Thus He must take them to Himself out of the world altogether. And that is what "I come quickly" also intimates.

Here, then, we have the brief solemn pause before the Lord takes His people to Himself. He must do this before the professing body is spewed out of His mouth. He cannot so reject even the poorest, weakest, and most

wayward of His own. And it is important to insist upon this, because there is abroad a view according to which only a class of better than ordinary Christians will be taken up when the Lord comes, while the rest will be left on earth to go through the tribulation which follows this, when the earth is enduring the vials of His wrath. They point to the promise to Philadelphia as in this way the promise to a special class. And the ten virgins of our Lord's parable they speak of as *all* Christians, (as they bring the fact of their being "virgins" forward to prove) only foolish Christians, unwatchful and unready, with the oil of the Spirit in their lamps, indeed, but no *extra* supply in their "vessels." Thus their lamps, which had been burning, cease to burn at last, and the fresh supply of oil they get is obtained too late for admission to the marriage. The Lord rejects them as His bride only: they lose their place in that, and are shut out to be purified by tribulation, and made ready for the Kingdom afterwards.

But how many precious realities must be denied by those who hold this view! Is it our faithfulness, then, that gives us a part among those who are dignified with the title of the Bride of Christ? Is the Lord, when He comes, indeed going to discriminate in this way between less and more faithfulness?—between ordinary and extraordinary Christians? What an engine for turning the blessed and purifying hope into a means of self-occupation and despair! If I am to be one of these more than ordinary Christians to be acknowledged by Him, where is the line to be drawn, and on which side of it am I? Is my joyful expectation of this blessed time to be based upon my belief in my own superiority to the many of my brethren? What comfortable Pharisaism, or what legal distress, must such a view involve!

If true, why should such a discrimination be made between the *living* saints alone? Why should it not

equally affect the dead? And then, what is to purify these?

As to Scripture, the support it gives to any such view is only apparent, and results from an interpretation of single passages which is at issue with its plainest doctrinal teaching. The coming of the Lord to remove His saints is not, in Scripture, ever connected even with our responsibilities and their adjustment, but with the fulfilment of the hope wherewith grace has inspired us. Our responsibilities and the reward of our works are ever connected with that which is called the appearing, or manifestation, or revelation of Christ—His coming *with* His saints, not *for* them. At the door of the Father's house to which He welcomes us when He comes, no sentry stands. We go into it as purged by the precious blood of Christ, and in Christ. Already are we not only entitled, but "*meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

When He comes to the world, and His people take their places with Him as associated with His government, then dignities, honors, rewards of work, will find their place. It will be "Have thou authority over ten"—"Be thou also over five cities." We cannot keep these things too distinct in our minds. Salvation, righteousness, the child's place with the Father, membership of the body of Christ, our relationship to Christ as His bride,—nay, also our being "kings and priests unto His God and Father," are things which are neither gained nor lost by work of ours at all. Christ has procured them for us, and grace bestows them—grace, and grace alone.

When the Lord Himself, therefore, descends from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, is there discrimination among those in Christ—of the dead, who shall be raised—of the living, who shall be changed? Nay, but "the dead in

Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we be ever with the Lord." Blessed words, how they pierce through and scatter the chilling fogs of legalism, and make "the blessed hope," not a means of sorest perplexity and doubt, but "hope" indeed!

Nor are the passages upon which these writers build in contradiction at all. The promise to the overcomer at Philadelphia is one of a class which, as the eye runs over them throughout these apocalyptic addresses, show plainly that they apply more or less to every true believer. Take the promise to him at Ephesus, and ask, will any believer not "eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God?" Take that to Smyrna, and ask, will any one "be hurt of the second death?" And so on through the remainder. To the least believer something surely of the spirit of the overcomer belongs: and while the promises suit themselves as encouragements to faith, adapted to the special condition of things pointed out, yet we know that the fruit of the tree of life, and deliverance from the second death, are not the result of any performances of ours, or any faithfulness on our part, but of His work, and of His grace alone.

Again, as to the ten virgins, it is a mistake to suppose that in that character Christians are represented as espoused to Christ at all. The virgins who go forth to meet the bridegroom are not the bride, and to put them in that place disjoins the parable. According to the whole tenor of the prophecy of these chapters, the Jewish people and the earth are the objects mainly in view, and the parable of the virgins parenthetically brings in the connection of Christians with it. The Lord is coming to take a *Jewish* bride, according to the common language of the Old Testament prophets. On His way to do this, His people of the present time are called up to meet Him,

and to return with Him. So much is implied in the expression in the Greek. It is when He is come, then, to earth that the foolish virgins are rejected; not rejected as His bride, but are cast out of His Kingdom altogether. The parable is a parable of the *Kingdom*; and the Kingdom in the parables embraces the whole field of profession. "Virgins," "servants," and such-like titles in them, merely intimate the responsible profession, not necessarily the truth. *He* was a servant who had laid up his lord's money in a napkin, and never really served at all. He was a servant, but a wicked one; and so with these foolish virgins.

As to oil, they are expressly stated to have taken *no* oil with them; and the Lord's words of rejection, "I know you not," are decisive from One who "knoweth them that are His," and could never disown them.

No, He cannot spew His own out of His mouth; He must take them out of what He is going to judge, before the first hot drops of the storm of judgment fall. Even then it will be made publicly manifest, before He rejects the public professing body, how really they have, on their part, rejected Him. Christendom ends in open apostasy. The day of the Lord will not come except there be a falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed. Popery, evil as it is, and antichristian too, is not the last evil, nor the worst. It is the harlot *woman*, not the *man*. It has been revealed over three hundred years at least, and the day of the Lord is not yet come. The Antichrist will deny the Father and the Son alike.

How solemn to contemplate this last end of what began so differently! How, above all, solemn to consider that, both at the beginning, and again at the end, the sin and failure of His own people is that which initiates and completes the ruin! Who can doubt that Christians everywhere are taking up this self-complacent utterance—"rich, and increased with goods, and in need of noth-

ing?" Who cannot see that truth is being taken up as a form of godliness apart from power, apart from all the practical results that should flow from it? And who but can see, that has eyes to see at all, that that is the most terrible and hopeless sign of all, when the salt wherewith the mass should be salted, is losing its savor and becoming powerless to act for God at all?

Ah, it is one thing to appreciate the comfort of the gospel, and the blessings which it procures for man, and it is another to accept honestly the level to which the gospel reduces all, and the place before God in Christ which brings poor and rich, and high and low, to a perfect equality, the rich rejoicing in that he is made low, as the brother of low degree in his exaltation.

Do we not want, all of us, to be reminded of what passed between the emulous disciples and their Lord on the solemn journey up to Jerusalem, when the cross was before the Master's face, but even its gaunt shadow could not still the contentious rivalry among His followers for the places on His right hand and His left, in His Kingdom? "You are making it a kingdom of the Gentiles!" is what He virtually says to them. "You are thinking of earthly place such as in these—of what would satisfy ambition and self-seeking greed! Do you think these are the places that are Mine to give? No; with Me the highest is the lowest; the greatness is in lowliest service; the blessedness is in giving, not receiving; the highest there—He (unchanged in spirit still) who as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

And then, as to our personal relationship to Christ, it is need that brings us to Him first, and makes us to know Him; and in His presence the sense of need, need met by Him, is ever maintained. It does not discourage us, for His grace is sufficiency; but it is only in weakness that His strength is made perfect still. "Rich, and

increased with goods, and in need of nothing," is what no soul in the presence of Christ can say. Rich *He* is; and for us those riches are available; but the richer He is in our eyes, the poorer we are in our own. We can only keep the Laodicean condition by keeping the Lord outside our door.

And is there not a creed everywhere, largely professed among those who claim to be in some sort the very leaders of the Christianity of the day, which comes very near indeed to Laodicean profession? How could the claim to be rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, be more really made than by those who claim for themselves "perfection?"

Perfection! What do they mean by it? That they walk in very deed and truth just "as Christ walked?" That is the Christian standard; we cannot, with Scripture before us, make it lower than that. But will anybody say that even for a single day, aye, for a single hour, he has walked just as Christ walked?

I know there is Scripture for the word. The devil, in deceiving Christians, will always take Scripture, if he can, to accomplish his purpose. But the Scripture term does not mean what in the dialect of the so-called "higher life" it is made to mean. Take one of the strongest texts used, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect:" the context shows decisively what is meant. We speak of a thing as perfect that has all its parts, without at all regarding the finish of the parts. So the Lord tells us that as children we must resemble our Father, and for this exhibit the different features of our Father's character. We must not only love those who love us, but, as He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust, we must exhibit this feature of His character also: not righteousness alone, but also love.

"Perfection" is also used for the mature Christian con-

dition, as a glance at the margin of Heb. v. 14 will show. The term there "of full age" is in the margin rendered "perfect," just as in 1 Cor. xiv. 20, "be *men*" is in the margin "perfect," or "of a ripe age." It is used thus with two applications. In Hebrews Christianity itself is perfection, or maturity, in contrast with Judaism, which was a state of childhood. But again, among Christians there are those perfect, or mature, in contrast with being "babes;" and the apostle Paul, in the third of Philippians, (in which he disclaims the having already attained, or being already "perfect"—a consummation which in that sense he would not reach until with Christ in glory,) classes himself immediately after among those who had in another sense attained: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

There are many texts, which I cannot now go through, but this should be sufficient to prevent the catching at a word, as people are prone to do. Plenty about perfection there is in Scripture, no doubt; but, as I said before, if people set up any standard of practical perfection short of walking as Christ walked, they are really lowering it. If, on the other hand, they can measure themselves with Christ and feel no rebuke, they must be more than credibly self-complacent.

Mischief is wrought two ways by the idea. In the first place, it tends to palliate sin, excuse or cover it by misleading names. Lust is called temptation, and sometimes even daring dishonor done to Christ Himself by the insinuation that He too was thus in like manner "tempted." So people quote "He was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet* without sin," as if it meant that *He* had such inward desires, only restrained them, so that there was no actual outbreak. This—the actual blasphemy of Irving and of Thomas—in milder and less positive forms infests masses in the present day. The text they quote, in the common version, favors these

views too much. There is no word "yet" in the original, as any one may see by the italics. "He was tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin," is the true rendering. You must not imply sin in any way in the Holy One of God! Sin it is that produces lust, and lust, again, brings forth the positive outward sin. *He* had neither, and herein was our total opposite, as Scripture testifies "in many things *we all* offend."

But, again, the character of holiness is sadly spoiled by this perfectionism. It becomes self-occupation, self-assertion. How much of Christ really do you find in the experiences so largely dealt in by those who advocate this doctrine? Is it, with the apostle, "not I, but Christ liveth in me," or is it, alas, a glorified, transfigured, very self-conscious I that lives and reigns throughout them? They do not see that as the natural life, in a state of health, does not engross or claim the attention,—as the heart's pulsation or the lungs' work is not furthered but disturbed by thinking of it,—so this aim at a self-conscious holiness produces but a poor, sickly Christianity at best. Is it far off from that which says, I am rich, and have need of nothing?

"I counsel thee," says the Lord to Laodicea,—*"I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."*

Three things they are exhorted to "buy." So wealthy are they, the Lord will not talk of *giving* to them. And, indeed, it would be a happy thing for them to exchange their riches for them—false glitter for true gold. This is the first thing, gold—a frequent symbol in Scripture, as you know; pure gold, as here, "gold tried in the fire," for what is divine. In the ark of the testimony, and in the furniture of the holy places generally, gold covered

all. The apostle, I believe, gives us the exact meaning when he speaks of the golden cherubim as "the cherubim of glory, shadowing the mercy-seat." This "glory" is the display of what God is. God glorifies Himself when He shines out in the blessed reality of what He is, and Christ is the true ark in which the two materials are found together—gold and shittim-wood. The radiance of divine glory is the gold; the shittim-wood, the precious verity of manhood.

Can we not see why, to Laodicea, the "gold tried in the fire" is the first requisite? Their riches were but paper money, manufactured out of the rags of self-righteousness, and of merely conventional, not intrinsic value. Christ is what they lacked: divine glory, in the only face in which it shines undimmed. This is the power of Christianity, its essence and its power alike; and this is what the false, pretentious Christianity of Laodicea lacked so terribly—occupation with Christ, discernment of what and where all that is true and valuable is to be found. To *know where* this is, is to have it. Faith, it is that finds this treasure. To be without it is to be poor indeed.

Next, "white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed," is, no doubt, practical righteousness of life and walk. There is a connection between this and the former, which, when we have their meaning, becomes evident enough. Unless you have the divine glory shining in the face of Jesus for your soul, you will find no ability to live or walk aright. The "white" is the reflection of the full, undivided ray of light; and God is light. How is our life to be the reflection of this except as "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts, to give out the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"? Leviticus must precede Numbers ever. We must go in to see God in the sanctuary before we can possibly come out and walk with Him in the world.

Finally, "anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Thus there was utter blindness—the condition of the Pharisees over again, for they surely did not realize it, but said, "We see;" and thus their sin remained. Had they been consciously blind, Christ was there to heal. But they, alas, needed not the Physician.

Still He says: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." To the last, He holds out a gracious invitation. His heart lingers while there is yet possibility of response on their part. But the day of grace is just about to end. If the words we have been considering find the parallel I have been drawing, if it be not untruly drawn, then we are surely near that end! Who can tell how near?

Before I close, however, I must return to that significant word which describes so vividly the moral, spiritual, aye, and political character of the latter days—"the church of the Laodiceans"—the men who claim "people's rights." Ominous name! terrible claim when uttered in the ears of a God strong and holy if yet so patient, and provoked every day. It is a claim which denies the fall and its sentence, confirmed by countless individual sins—the claim of a world which has refused and crucified the Son of God come into it in loving mercy!

Let us look at it politically, for its political aspect is not without the deepest significance. Are not everywhere the nations quaking at the prospect of an uprising of the masses with this very watchword? When democracy meant only the curbing of the despotic power of rulers; when it meant still respect for wealth and rank, and law and order, they could rejoice over it, and cite it as the evidence of morally improved times. Arbitrary power

only was to be restrained; there was to be equal justice, and quietness and assurance as the effect of righteousness. No doubt the abuse of power had been great enough to provoke reprisals, and to make the downfall of absolutism an apparent real advancement. But man was and is the same; and the mistake has been ever to suppose that alterations of this kind could really heal or touch a moral state which was the essence of the trouble. The leprosy, skinned over here, would break out elsewhere, for it was deeper than the surface—in the blood—in the vitals of humanity itself.

Who could say where the movement for men's rights should stop? Who could say to the restless surge of the sea, Come no further! here shall thy waves be stayed? There were, and there are still, infinite and gigantic evils,—the power and abuse of wealth, for instance,—tyrannies which no form of government devised had touched or could take into account. What does every man's right to his own imply? What is his own? Is his right to use it to include a right to the enormous abuse of it which self-interest with power at its back will always make? Whose rights are to be respected when they come in conflict?

And from a lower level than before come murmurs, hoarse and threatening: socialism, communism, nihilism, anarchism—dread names, not merely for the monarch, but also for the man of property and the law-abiding citizen. "People's rights" threaten to be in terrible conflict with one another, and in their name how many wrongs to be inflicted! This is the Laodicea of politics, which is destined to be the rock on which governmental reform will surely split, and end in anarchy and chaos. "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things

which are coming on the earth : for the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

But the removal of the things that can be shaken will only make way for a Kingdom—not such as they anticipate, but absolute, which admits of no dispute, and righteous altogether. How comforting to turn from the thoughts that have engaged us, and think of the contrast to all rule the world has ever seen! "He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people; and the little hills by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people; He shall save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor. . . . In His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him."

Politically, the Laodician condition closes also the present state of things.

In another phase of it we shall find Laodicea characterizing the ecclesiastical state. The political aspect, when Church and state have come so near together, naturally affects the ecclesiastical aspect too. Democracy is manifesting itself unmistakably in this sphere also. The people are rising up against the long rule of their spiritual leaders, and are claiming their rights at the hands of these. But they are not content with what is their just due here: they must be lords of their former masters. They pay their ministers; and who is the real master—he who pays, or he who is paid? Having control of the purse-strings, they see no reason why they should not choose their pastor as they choose their lawyer or their doctor. But this means that preachers must preach to please them: their doctrines, their style, must approve themselves to the criticism of their hearers.

And thus, alas, Scripture is being more and more fulfilled which, prophesying of the last days, says: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap *to themselves* teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

You know that I am advocating no spiritual aristocracy in saying this. People would accuse me, perhaps, of the opposite extreme. But in truth both are alike unscriptural. Neither aristocracy nor democracy is God's principle, but a true *theocracy*. Christ is alone master—not clergy, not people. Ministers are but "servants," as the very name imports; but not "servants of men"—against which the apostle, as you will remember, so vehemently contends. "If I yet pleased men," says he, "I should not be the servant of Christ." Thus are these two things in essential opposition. Christ needs to be in His true place, which Laodiceanism, here as elsewhere, excludes Him from. Bring Christ in, and the ministers are *His* servants. Bring Christ in, and the people are *His* people. His service, on the part of all alike, is true and perfect freedom alike to all.

You will understand me when I say that I rejoice to see the pernicious distinction between clergy and laity being in some measure done away. I rejoice in the free evangelizing which is going on in almost all denominations: I rejoice to see Christ's people taking their true place, as a distinctive priesthood in relation to Him, and vested rights of clerisy being done away. Only let God's word settle all: let Christ have His sovereign rights: Laodiceanism will be then impossible.

But, finally, let us never forget there is a spiritual Laodicea. And this, too, in a double way. It may be purely spiritual: and here perfectionism, which we have glanced at, is plainly one form. Another, upon a lower plane, is to be found in that spirit which contents itself with out-

ward church prosperity; and, neglecting divine measurement, seeing the Church and the world nearer together, assumes that the world is coming up to the Christian level, when it is Christians who are coming down to the level of the world. Christ must be outside the door for any to think so. The soul supping with Christ, and Christ with it, surely knows better what are His tastes, and how little the ostentatious ecclesiasticism or the showy charities so abundant can suit Him. Let me not speak disparagingly. I do not assign all (God forbid!) to one common rubbish heap. There are numbers of devoted, sincere laborers whose labors are with God, and whose fruit will be found with Him. And He, too, who seeth not as man seeth, neither seduced by fair appearances nor harsh in premature judgment,—He who teaches us that in taking forth the precious from among the vile we shall be as *His* mouth,—*He*, much more, will find that which is valuable to Him, doubtless, in that which to us may seem the merest refuse. Still, the general result is but little affected. The heart that can look complacently upon the general condition of things religiously can scarcely be with Christ aright. It is not a question of prophetic knowledge merely, or what views we entertain about the Lord's coming, (though our views and our disposition of heart cannot be altogether disconnected,) but it is a question of obedience to His Word, and of truth of heart to Him.

But spiritual Laodiceanism has yet another phase, and—shall I own it to you?—to me it is the most hopeless and distressing. It is where grace is owned and the Christian standpoint is assumed, the Christian language used, the ecclesiastical position, so to speak, all right, but where this is all found essentially inoperative upon the soul! Because here the failure of the Word is most decided; and if the Word fails, what is there to renew us by?

Beloved brethren, let me return then to this, and insist a little upon it: can we insist too much where this awful brand of Laodicea rests upon the one with whom God's truth is only professed, to be more than ever denied,—Christ's name assumed to be more than ever dishonored!

The place in new creation, is it ours? do we profess it ours, that wondrous place, where, for every one who is in Christ Jesus, "old things are passed away and all things become new"? If our standing is in Him, is our "walk according to this rule" of the new creation in Christ Jesus? Are we, as to all fleshly standing, title, claim, dead with Christ, buried, never to come up again? Who would think of the old Laodicean contention upon ground like this? Who would dream of "people's rights" being here once more the watchword among the followers of a carpenter's Son whom the world crucified, and whose chief spiritual leaders are the fishermen of Galilee?

Brethren, be cold or hot! be one thing or another plainly. When all are one in Christ, shall there be room for the hateful strife of democrat and aristocrat, as if the world was *not* crucified to us, as if we did *not* glory in that cross of Christ by which we are crucified to the world? "Members one of another," "all one in Christ Jesus"—is this not social equality of the very highest order? Brethren alike in the family of God, is this indeed, or is it not, nearer, dearer, more powerful than the ties of flesh? Not aristocracy, not democracy, but *theocracy*—let that be our watchword!

Is a worldly position something? do our brethren feel that in our intercourse with them we do indeed (in language which Scripture is not responsible for, though our common version is) "*condescend* to men of low estate?"*

* Rom. xii. 16; translated better in a recent version "Have the same respect one for another, not minding high things, but *going along with the lowly* [or *what is lowly*]."

Do they feel that it is "condescension," not a recognition of true equality?

On the other hand, is a worldly position which we have *not*, something? and are we using our Christian place to lift ourselves higher in the world, or to assert in the face of another the "equal rights" which are ours?

To both sides, no study could be more wholesome than that of the brief epistle in which we find the apostle Paul sending *back* to his former condition a runaway slave, now Christian, to his former master, Christian also. "Receive him as myself," he says to the latter; "no longer as a servant, but above a servant, a *brother beloved*." Such was the relationship of Onesimus to his former master; and such words, in those old days of deeper reality, *meant what they said*.

Then, also, as to Onesimus, was *he* to claim the place which grace had put him in, and insist on "equal rights" with his master? Was he to use his Christianity to escape from his slavery, and that because his master was a Christian? No; on either side, no! Grace was that under the supremacy of which both master and slave were now alike—the slave to the master a "brother beloved," but himself subject to a grace which, if it had given him the new relationship, taught him to value it too highly to prostitute it to the claim of worldly advantage.

To *claim* grace is not grace. It is not grace in me to pull down another from an assumed level, nor yet to claim one's own from others. It is the prerogative of grace to stoop to serve; and yet it is grace's prerogative to lift the lowest up upon a level so high that the highest of earth's princes shall esteem it only immeasurable exaltation to be allowed to share it with him. Oh, to be ever *Christians!*—to sup with Him who, if He admits us to His company, must have the door kept open for all that are His!—His, and to be associated with Him in

the fast-coming glory, before which all earthly glory even now pales and dies!

Philadelphia and Laodicea! significant contrasts! with which are we? Surely, surely the closing days of Christendom are Laodicean. Sorrowfully I feel it, and affirm it. And what then? Why, then He is near; He will come. Let us brace ourselves to our duty; let us hold fast the faith; let us be only more fully subject to Him whose rule is service, whose yoke is easy, whose presence and whose fellowship begin heaven for us upon earth. Oh, to know it better! As we look around, as we look within, our exhortation changes into prayer.



