



Counsel to Christians

A Sermon by George Müller of Bristol

In leaving home to preach the Word of life, as it may please God to give openings to me, I have it specially on my heart to seek to lend a helping hand to young believers, and to throw out points whereby, in the very outset of the Christian life, they may be helped so to walk, that God may give them to enjoy peace and true happiness, and which may, by His blessing, cause them in the very beginning of their spiritual life to bear fruit to the praise, the honour, and glory of the Lord. I more especially seek to do so, because, for the first four years after my conversion, I made many mistakes about the things of God, and was far from walking in the road which leads to real joy and happiness in the Lord, and far from being in a position to grow either in grace or knowledge.

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Four years after I had known the Lord, through the helping hand of an older and more experienced brother I was led into a way whereby I increased more rapidly in knowledge and grace, and was consequently, in some little measure, able to glorify the Lord and to be more useful than before. The great mistake I made at the outset, was neglect of the divine Word, and in consequence of this many things were lacking. Therefore, it is laid upon my heart to impress it upon my younger brethren and sisters, to go from the very outset to the Word of God.

CONVICTION OF SIN

I now speak more especially to believers; and by this I do not understand those who at sometime or other have had some religious impressions. These may lead to nothing, and therefore there must be something more in order to be children of God. In order to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be regenerated, must be on the road to heaven and have been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son." For all this, more is wanted than mere religious impressions. Many persons have these, and are brought no further; but there they remain. It is needful that we should have been brought in a greater or less degree to look upon ourselves as sinners in need of a Saviour. And therefore I ask affectionately, Have we been convinced of this?

I am not speaking of degree. With ten thousand different persons, God may work in ten thousand different ways. I myself had little of this serious, deep conviction of sin at the beginning of my new life, and yet was, I believe, really and truly converted; and from the very beginning there was a marked difference in me. Yet I did see I was a sinner deserving punishment and nothing else. As to the degree of this sorrow, that is quite a different thing. We must, if we are children of God, have been convinced in the light of His word, that we are sinners deserving of punishment, and that the Lord Jesus Christ alone can save.

TRUST IN CHRIST

Then, again, we must be led to trust in Him; for we may have been convinced of sin, and yet have gone no further. If so, we are not on the road to heaven yet. We must have put all our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls.

And all the more do I make these remarks, my beloved friends, because at such a time, when a wave of divine blessing has been passing through the land, and so many have been led to make a profession of faith, many may be trusting in a mere impression, perhaps a conviction, to some extent, of sin. All this is right as far as it goes, but not enough. Such are as yet in the state of which the Lord speaks - "Not far from the kingdom of heaven," and yet not in it. We must have passed from death unto life, ere we are the children of God, and there is no such thing as being a child of God without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, then, is most important, that we trust in Him; and in Him alone, for the salvation of our souls, and that we have no other hope in the matter of our salvation, than the merits and the intercession of Him, who sits on the right hand of God.

If we have been convinced of sin, and have believed in Him, then, as it is said in Acts x. 43, we have received remission of sin. Then are we the children of God, as in Gal. iii. 26. And, again, it is said that "to as many as received" the Lord Jesus Christ, "to them gave He power to become the sons of God." It is to these poor sinners who have trusted in the Lord Jesus for the salvation of their souls, that I desire particularly to speak. Those alone are they who have the bright blessed prospect of heaven, and who know in their own blessed experience, the joy of the latter part of Rom. viii., or have the glorious confidence of Philippians i. 6, that "He who hath begun a good work will perform it." To you, brother and sister in Christ, I desire to say a few words as to the Christian life.

UPRIGHTNESS

One of the most deeply important points to the young believer - indeed to all believers - is to aim after uprightness and honesty of heart. We may have a fair amount of prayerfulness, may read the word of God, may be frequently in a place of worship, and yet, with all these things, we lack much, yea all, if we have not uprightness of heart before God. My dear Christian friends, ask yourselves, as before God the Searcher of hearts, before Him who knows everything about you, how it is with you as to this point? Can you stand before Him and say in honesty, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee, and that my desire is not to listen to sin and temptation, and not willingly to go on in anything contrary to Thy mind. I would have nothing that Thou hatest; but, by Thy grace, I am engaged in a warfare against it. Thou knowest how Thy weak, erring child hates the deeds of darkness, and desires to carry on a warfare daily against these powers."

Do we really seek to walk in this way? Then we shall have part in the blessed words of the Lord Jesus (Matt. xiii. 12), "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." I desire these words to be fixed upon your hearts, because, in looking back on the past fifty years, during which I have known the Lord, I can see the faltering steps with which I began. How weak I was! How ignorant! Even when preaching the Word, how ignorant! Although Christ was in me, the hope of glory, yet I failed again and again. Nevertheless, I made warfare against sin, and sought not to listen to Satan. I experienced, therefore, the truth of these words, "To Him that hath shall be given," and although it was by little and little, yet I did grow. So this evening I say to you, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

But remember, it is added, "But whosoever hath not" - or only appears to have - "from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." Thus, those who do not maintain an upright heart, and who do not walk sincerely before God, shall, for the time, make no progress in the divine life, because the Holy

Spirit does not work in such. Therefore it is deeply important to be sincere and honest before Him who knoweth the heart; and then, although we may be weak, yet we shall be helped in the divine life.

I know how much this one thing helped me at the first-honesty and uprightness of heart. And I remember one who was converted at the same time, and whom I met years after, and found he was just the same as at first - he had made no progress whatever; and it was because he was not honest and upright before God.

DENYING UNGODLINESS

The next deeply important point is this, whatever at the very outset of the divine life is hateful to God, must be given up. Whatever is offensive to Him, must be forsaken. Some say this is only needful regarding glaring sins, but it must be in everything. If the Holy Ghost says "No," the sin must be put aside at once. We must be faithful to Him. This unfaithfulness, this dallying with sin, is hindering the spiritual life of many. I wish to impress it on your hearts, that from the very beginning you should seek to be out-and-out Christians.

With many who set out in the divine life, the question is, "How much of the world can I keep, and yet get to heaven?" "How much can I enjoy of this world, and yet be saved?" There may be such a thing as being saved under such circumstances; but it is being saved "as by fire;" and none of God's children should be content to be saved as by fire.

Better far that you and I were to be at once taken home to the Lord, than that we should be satisfied with being saved ourselves, and still seeking to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this world as much as possible; trying how much we can make of both worlds. This is the most wretched possible thing for us to do. Under such circumstances you will have just religion enough to make you a miserable Christian; a happy Christian you can never be while living so.

There are no happy children who are not also holy children. The Father says, "Let *that* mind be also found in you which was found in Him." And what was the life of the Lord Jesus? "Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." His life was one single sacrifice to God, one single act of obedience to God. Now, we are left here to be representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. This great honour He has bestowed upon us here. He might bring us to know Him, and then take us away at once to be with Him, as with the thief on the cross; but, as you all know, this is not His ordinary way. He brings us to Himself, in order that we may bring honour to His name, and glorify Him on this earth; and also, that we may practically and experimentally be prepared for the glory that awaits us above; and that each of us may have the honour of winning souls for Him, and be helpful to the children of God: in short, that we should bear fruit.

FRUITFULNESS

Well, this being the case - that we are left here to bring glory to His name - our heavenly Father expects us to live in separation from the world; and He does expect us not to go on in a sinful state. If we seek it, He will help us to be holy children, in order that we may be useful. Let us all aim after this. We should not be satisfied without bearing fruit, but should seek to be out-and-out for God.

There is such a thing as bearing much fruit - sixty or even a hundred-fold. Nor should you and I be content with thirty-fold, without seeking to bring forth sixty or a hundred-fold. Ought we not in earnest longing to pray that we may be permitted to bear fruit to the praise, honour, and glory of God?

But in order to this, there is nothing better than at once, in the very outset of the divine life, to aim after being out-and-out Christians. And never should any child of God harbour such a thought as this, "How much can I enjoy this world, and yet get to heaven at last? Is it possible for me by going to a ball, and attending a concert, or going to the theatre now and then, at last to get to heaven?" Oh! wretched, miserable state for a child of God to be in. Away with it! Be it far from any of those whom God has left on earth as witnesses for His glory.

I am here a pilgrim and a stranger, and far be it from me so, to set my heart on this earth. I am going to heaven; this is not my place. As a child of God I know that no place is my place save that upon which I can ask my Father's blessing. How could I ask His blessing in the theatre? How could I ask God to bless me in the whirl of the ballroom, or at the card-table or in the noisy tavern? Away with all of them; they are the sinful pleasures of this evil world.

LIVING CHRIST

So, my beloved younger brethren and sisters in Christ at the very outset of your spiritual life say boldly "I will be, by the grace of God, an out-and-out Christian, living for God. I will, by His grace, seek to bear fruit to His glory and honour. I will, by His grace, seek to have done with this sinful world; I will, by His grace, strive so to live, that a line of demarcation shall be clearly seen between me and the world, and that the people of the world shall seek to have no intercourse with me, seeing that I do not belong to them, but that I belong to the kingdom of heaven."

That is what we have to aim after; and what would be the result? Not only should we be holy men and women, but also happy men and women, in whom God delights; and we should also be useful men and women. The world ought to say of each of us, "If ever there was a Christian, it is surely that man or that woman." "Surely that man or woman has been with Jesus." If the world does not say that of us, there is something wanting. We ought to be ashamed, if anyone is able to live three or four days in the house with us, without finding out that we are not of the world, but are born again.

And that is not the only use of thus bearing testimony; it will also be very helpful to our brethren in the Lord.

Let me insist particularly, my beloved brethren and sisters, but especially you, my younger brethren and sisters, on this point - that of being out-and-out for God in the very outset. We must be opposed to the world, and the flesh, and entirely for Christ. This is the purpose for which we are left in the world. I do not say we are to give up our ordinary business. I have seen much of this; there is often too much readiness in giving up the earthly business, and it is often done hastily. I have found that men may greatly glorify God in their earthly business, and I do not say that they are to forsake that business in order to become evangelists, missionaries, district visitors, tract distributors, or the like. We may serve and honour Him well whilst occupied with the business of this life. If God does call us, by all means go at once; but do not go unless He calls. We require a special call from God, and even when we think we have received it, let us make it a matter of consideration. Let us prayerfully, quietly, and calmly look to God before taking such a step.

But, again, I say, if there be anything, whatever it may be, and however dear it may be, which is contrary to the divine will, let us give it up at once, and aim after being out-and-out, and decided for God in every way. The result will be increased happiness, joy, and holiness; and our usefulness will increase more and more.

In connection with this, I would especially state that, though we all ought to aim after conformity to the mind of Christ, yet we all more or less fail.

It is deeply important to mark, that all of us are liable to sin, and do sin. If any man come to me, and say, "I do not sin," I would say, "My brother, you are mistaken; perhaps you do not know what sin is, or you do not know your own state." All of us, though not living in sin, are yet liable to sin; if not in acts, yet in words; or if not even in words, yet in feelings or desires. We are all apt to fall short of what we might be and of what we ought to be. What then? Well, we must make confession, and come afresh to the blood of Jesus Christ, and have these sins washed away.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Many children of God err here. As, for instance, when I was first converted, I thought, when I sinned that now it was all over, as I could not be a Christian, or a child of God. Or if not this there was at least a feeling in me, "Before you come to God in prayer, you must seek to be better. What a great mistake! And yet many of God's dear children make this mistake, and if they fall in any way, in acting, speaking, thinking, or desiring, they feel that they cannot approach with confidence.

What ought they to do? Why, at once to make confession to God. They should seek to enter into that gracious promise, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." This is deeply important to us all because the Spirit of God will not work in our hearts if there is guilt. There is therefore no practical power to resist sin, or to walk with God, as long as sin is not cleansed away. And as we are liable to err, more especially our younger brethren and sisters, yet we must not think we are not Christians because we do so-and-so. Let us cast away this thought, and not entertain it for a moment. Only let us be stirred to go afresh to the Lord Jesus Christ, to have the sin put away.

This is where the words of the Lord Jesus come in, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet; but is clean every whit." Remember our position: we are not criminals; we were that, but such is not the case now." We are in the relationship of children. In this new relationship, however, we are apt to defile ourselves; just as a man who takes a bath in the morning, may require to wash his hands or his face throughout the day, and yet his body is clean. So are we, though apt to defile ourselves, yet clean.

But for this defilement we must come afresh, practically and experimentally, to the blood of Christ. If this be neglected, the result will be loss of power and joy. But it is a grievous mistake to stay away from God because we have sinned, and to wait until we are better. We are to come as we are, to obtain peace and joy in the Lord.

CONFESSING CHRIST

The next point is also deeply important, and it is, at the very outset of the divine life we must make a plain, bold confession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very few things are of greater importance than this. The

temptation will be, to keep your new life to yourself: "I can get to heaven without telling." Well, if you do so, you are weak, and will remain weak. It is of great importance, even for the vigour of your own Christian life, to make confession, and come out boldly for Christ at once. The reason is this - people will know that you are on the Lord's side, and will therefore no longer tempt you to act otherwise. They will no longer come with invitations to the theatre, or such and such a ball, or company, of a purely worldly character. You escape all this by open confession. If they know you are the Lord's, and see the line of demarcation between you and the world, they will not seek your company.

I remember when I was converted, I was a student in a large university, where there were twelve hundred and sixty students. Amongst all these there were only three who were known as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; but it was well known what they were; they were "marked men." I joined them, and became a "marked man" instantaneously. But we held out, and soon there were about half-a-dozen united together. We were called fanatics and mystics; and I used to be pointed at by my fellow-students, "There goes the mystic." What of this? In three or four weeks it was all over, and they left me alone. Before my conversion, I had been one of the gayest among them, and was continually at the theatre. If there was a ball, I was there; and in the tavern I was one of the noisiest. But now, looked on as a "marked man," they gave me up as a hopeless case, and ceased to annoy me. Thus I escaped a thousand temptations to which I would otherwise have been exposed. If I had kept back the knowledge of my conversion, would I not have been continually tempted to sin?

This is my own experience, I know the blessed result of thus boldly confessing Christ, and would affectionately press it upon all my brothers and sisters in Jesus. If any here have not yet made this bold confession of their decision for Christ, oh, make it now! It will be of immense service to you.

Again, in doing so, we stand by the side of Christ. He comes forward, and takes His stand by our side, saying, "In weakness thou hast stood for Me; now I will stand by thee;" and thus we reap the benefit in our own souls. We can never have grace and strength by keeping our religion to ourselves. You will never be out-and-out Christians - never be happy Christians - without this confession.

The will of the Lord is that we should be as cities set on a hill, which cannot be hid; or as lights, not placed under a bushel, but set on a lamp-stand, so as to be seen. And, let us aim after this, if it is not the case with us now; and let us be assured, that, when any man aims at keeping his religion to himself, he is going the wrong road. People must know that we are the Lord's, and on His side; and we should not rest satisfied without this. Our duty, remember, is to win souls for Him; and how can we do this, if we hide our light? Although we are neither evangelists, missionaries, Sunday-school teachers, nor visitors, yet God will help us to win souls; therefore, we have to come out boldly for Him.

GROWTH IN CHRIST

Another deeply important point is this; very frequently the dear children of God, at the very outset of their new life, are immensely discouraged, because they do not feel themselves making the progress they ought to make, or wish to make. They are afraid, because they do not make this progress in knowledge or grace, that they are not Christians. Now, as an encouragement to the dear young brethren and sisters, I would say, be not over-discouraged by this. I do not mean to say we are to rest content without making progress, I only warn you against one of Satan's devices - viz., that when we are failing in any way, he is apt to say to us that we are not Christians; that, after all we have felt, we are only deceiving ourselves. Now, every one of you know well enough whether you are deceiving yourselves or not. You

have all of you the witness within you, and you can look up and say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." We may not have the bold faith and triumphant assurance of Peter, or of Paul, but we can say "We do love Thee." And while conscious of our weakness and unworthiness, yet we are also conscious of our faith.

You know very well, for instance, when the child is born, it is not at once a young man. It is a babe; a weak, helpless babe. When it is a week old, you do not expect it to run about. We all know how it takes week after week, and month after month, ere it can so run. So it is in the divine life; you do not at once become young men or women in the Lord Jesus. And if any should come to me after being only three or four weeks in Christ, and complain that he is not full grown, I should say to him, "My dear friend, you are greatly mistaken. I do not expect to see you already become a young man, and far less a father in Christ." There is no such thing as fits and starts in the divine life. As in the natural life it requires some time to attain to manhood, so, in the spiritual life; therefore let them not be discouraged that they have not yet become young men or young women in Christ, and far less that they have not become fathers and mothers in Him.

Let them, I say, not be discouraged, but steadily and quietly go on, living according to the light God has given them. If they are thus walking, it will be unto them according to the promise, "To him that hath, it shall be given, and he shall have more abundance" : For your encouragement, let me give you my own experience.

OLD ENEMIES

I was, at the beginning of my new life, again and again overcome by my old tendencies. For instance, I had been a habitual liar in former days, and could stand and look people in the face, and deliberately say things that were not true. If any of you have been so, my friends, you know what a terrible thing it is. Well, after my conversion I stated twice things that were not true; but that was a very different thing from habitually telling lies; for with sorrow of heart I confessed it before God, and owned before Him that such and such was not the truth.

Again, I had been a habitual attendant at the theatre; and twice after my conversion, through circumstances, I was drawn in to go to the theatre; but, nevertheless, I was humbled before the Lord, and it was a very different thing from my former habitual attendance.

Soon God delivered me from that also. Therefore I wish to say that no child of God who, by deeds, words, or thoughts, is carried away to sin against God, should give heed to the suggestion of the devil, "There is no reality in your conversion." Rather let us come afresh to the blood of Jesus, which "taketh away all sin." Remember that this blood not only washes away, but also gives us more and more power over sin. By coming frequently, we shall grow in grace and in experience. I may say I have grown somewhat since those days, to which, for your encouragement, I have referred; and what one has done, others may do.

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Another important point is, to seek at Once, or as soon as possible, to unite ourselves to some dear children of God, or to some faithful ministry. Wherever you find Christians, with whom it would be to

your profit to mingle, or a ministry likely to feed your soul, go there; only get into some little band of God's children, or disciples, at once. Remember, it will be very helpful to you in your new life.

I am not referring to this or that particular place, but wherever God has cast your lot, and wherever there are dear children of the Lord, go there. Go where the gospel is faithfully set forth, and get united to them, that they may help you as the younger brother or sister. You will find such fellowship very helpful to you. I myself found it of the utmost value.

Shortly after my conversion, there were a few other students led to the Lord, and we used to meet together regularly in my room, and sought to help one another. It was very helpful. But, where practicable, I would advise you to seek out the company of some older and more experienced Christian - one who is really a living gospel Christian - to whom you can speak freely, and from whom you can get much useful advice and counsel. All you older believers may lend a helping hand to your younger brothers and sisters, and thus be a great help to one another.

I have often found that, when led astray by natural tendency, the fellowship of my brother-students was exceedingly helpful, and often brought me into the light again. Especially would I say to all Christians - not merely the younger, but even the older - seek to have some truly spiritual friend, to whom you can run and unbosom yourself, and take sweet counsel together; you will find it to be very helpful in the things of God.

I have much more to say, but will continue the subject on Friday evening, when I will seek to bring before you many other important points.

As most of you know already, the especial object of our meeting is, to continue the subject of last Tuesday evening. On that evening, I sought to lend a helping hand to beloved Christian friends, especially the younger brothers and sisters, who are setting out in the diving life.

As one who for fifty years has known the Lord, and has laboured in word and doctrine, I ought to be able, in some little measure, to lend a helping hand to these younger believers. And, by the grace of God, I can say, I *am* able to lend this helping hand; that is, if God will only condescend to use my own failures, to which I have freely referred, and my experience, as a help to others in walking on the road to heaven, I trust that your coming here will not be in vain. As I already told you, this was the very purpose of my leaving home, that I might help these dear young brethren.

I have already referred to seven different points, which appeared to me to be of great moment. There still remain, however, some other deeply important ones to be considered.

THE MANNER OF READING THE WORD

One of the most deeply important points is, that of attending to the careful, prayerful reading of, and meditation on the word of God. I would ask your particular attention to one verse in the epistle of Peter (I Peter ii. 2) where we are especially exhorted by the Holy Ghost, through the apostle, regarding this. For the sake of the connection, let us read the first verse, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

The particular point to which I refer is contained in the second and third verses, "as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word." As growth in the natural life is attained by proper food, so in the spiritual life, if we desire to grow, this growth is only to "be attained through the instrumentality of the word of God. It is not stated here, as some might be very willing to say, "the reading of the Word may be of importance under some circumstances." That you may gain more by reading this tract, or this and that book, is not the statement here; it is "the Word," and nothing else, and, under all circumstances,

STICK TO THE WORD OF GOD

You say that the reading of this tract or that book often does you good; I do not question it at all. Nevertheless, the instrumentality which God has been pleased to appoint and use is that of the Word itself; and just in the measure in which the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ attend to this, they will become strong in the Lord; and in so far as it is neglected, so far will they be weak. There is such a thing as babes being neglected, and what is the consequence? They never become healthy men or women, because of that early neglect.

Perhaps - and it is one of the most hurtful forms of this neglect - they obtain improper food, and therefore do not attain to the full vigour of manhood or womanhood. So with regard to the divine life. It is a most deeply important point, that we obtain right spiritual food at the very beginning of that life. What is that food? It is "the sincere milk of the Word;" that is the proper nourishment for the strengthening of the inner man. Listen, then, my dear brethren and sisters, to this advice with regard to the Word.

CONSECUTIVE READING

First of all, it is of the utmost moment that we regularly read through the Scripture. We ought not to turn over the Bible, and pick out chapters as we please here and there, but to read it regularly through. We should read carefully and regularly through the Scriptures. I speak advisedly, and as one who has known the blessedness of thus reading the Word for the last forty-six years. I say *forty-six* years, because for the first four years of my Christian life I did not carefully read the word of God. I used to read a tract, or an interesting book; but I knew nothing of the power of the Word. I read next to nothing of it, and the result was, that, though a preacher then, and though I had preached in connection with the establishment again and again, yet I made no progress in the divine life. And why? Just for this reason, that I neglected the word of God.

But it pleased God, through the instrumentality of a beloved Christian brother, then labouring in this very city and neighbourhood, with whom I became acquainted in Devonshire, to rouse in me an earnestness about the Word, and ever since then I have been a lover of it.

Let me, then, press upon you my first point, that of attending regularly to reading through the Scripture. I do not suppose that you *all* need the exhortation: many, I believe, have already done so, but I speak for the benefit of those who have not. To those I say, my dear friends, begin at once. Begin with the Old Testament, and when you have read a chapter or two and are about to leave off, put a mark that you may know where you have left off. I speak in all simplicity, for the benefit of those who may be young in the divine life. The next time you read, begin the New Testament, and again put a mark where you leave off. And thus go on always, whether in the Old or New Testaments, putting in a mark, and reading

alternately the Old and the New Testaments. Thus, by little and little, you will read through the whole Bible; and when you have finished, just begin again at the beginning.

THE CONNECTION OF SCRIPTURE

Why is this so deeply important? Simply that we may see the connection between one book and another of the Bible, and between one chapter and another; If we do not read in this consecutive way, we lose a great part of what God has given to instruct us. Moreover, if we are children of God we should be well acquainted with the whole revealed will of God - the whole of the Word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable."

And much may be gained by thus carefully reading through the whole will of God. Suppose a rich relative were to die and leave us, perhaps, some land, or houses, or money, should we be content with reading only the clauses that affected us particularly? No, we would be careful to read the whole will right through. How much more, then, in the will of God, ought we to be careful to read it right through, and not merely one and another of the chapters or books.

BENEFIT OF CONSECUTIVE READING

And this careful reading of the word of God has this advantage, that it keeps us from making a system of doctrines of our own, and from having our own particular favourite views, which is very pernicious. We often are apt to lay too much stress on certain views of the truth which affect us particularly. The will of the Lord is that we should know His whole mind. Again, variety in the things of God is of great moment. And God has been pleased to give us this variety in the highest degree; and the child of God, who follows out this plan, will be able to take an interest in any part of the Word.

Suppose one says, "Let us read in Leviticus." Very well, my brother. Suppose another says, "Let us read in the prophecy of Isaiah." Very well, my brother. And another will say, "Let us read in the gospel according to Matthew." Very well, my brother; I can enjoy them all; and whether it be in the Old Testament, or in the New Testament, whether in the prophets, the gospels, the Acts, or the Epistles, I should welcome it, and be delighted to welcome the reading and study of any part of the divine Word.

A SPECIAL BENEFIT

And this will be particularly of advantage to us, in case we should become labourers in Christ's vineyard; because, in expounding the Word, we shall be able to begin at the beginning. We shall equally enjoy the reading of the Word, whether of the Old or the New Testament, and shall never get tired of it. I have, as before stated, known the blessedness of this plan for forty-six years, and though I am now nearly seventy years of age, and though I have been for nearly fifty years in the divine life, I can say, by the grace of God, that I more than ever love the word of God and have greater delight than ever in reading it.

And this day, though I have read the Word nearly a hundred times right through, I am as fond as ever of reading the Scripture; I never have got tired of reading it, and this is more especially through reading it regularly, consecutively day by day, and not merely reading a chapter here and there, as my own thoughts might have led me to do.

READING THE WORD PRAYERFULLY

Again, we should read the Scripture prayerfully, never supposing that we are clever enough, or wise enough, to understand God's Word by our own wisdom. In all our reading of the Scriptures let us seek carefully to have the help of the Holy Spirit; let us ask, for Jesus' sake, that He will enlighten us; He is willing to do it.

I will tell you how it fared with me, at the very first; it may be for your encouragement. It was in the year 1829, when I was living in Hackney, not far from here. My attention had been called to the teaching of the Spirit by a dear brother of experience. "Well," I said, "I will try this plan; and will give myself to the careful reading and meditation of the word of God after prayer, and I will see how much the Spirit is willing to teach me in this way."

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS

I went accordingly to my room, and locked my door, and putting the Bible on a chair, I went down on my knees at the chair. There I remained for several hours in prayer and meditation over the word of God; and I can tell you that I learned more in those three hours which I spent in this way, than I had learned for many months previously. I found the blessing was so great, that all the manuscripts, which I had written down from the lectures of the professors of Divinity in the university that I previously attended, I now considered to be of so little value, that when, soon after, I moved into Devonshire, I did not think them worth the carriage. This was because I now found the Holy Spirit to be a better teacher than professors of Divinity. I obtained the teaching of the divine Spirit, and I cannot tell you the blessedness it was to my own soul as I was praying in the Spirit, and putting my trust in the power of the Spirit as I had never done before.

You cannot, therefore, be surprised at my earnestness in pressing this upon you, when you have heard how precious to my heart it was, and how much it helped me.

MEDITATE ON THE WORD

But again, it is not enough to have prayerful reading only, but we must also meditate on the Word. As in the instance I have just referred to, kneeling before the chair, I meditated on the Word; not simply reading it, not simply praying over it; all that, but, in addition, pondering over what I had read. This is deeply important. If you merely read the Bible, and no more, it is just like water running in at one side and out at the other. In order to be really benefited by it, we must meditate on it.

Not all of us, of course, can spend many hours, or even one or two hours, each day thus. Our business demands our attention. Yet, however short the time you can afford, give it regularly to reading, prayer, and meditation over the Word, and you will find it well repaid.

MAKE THE MEDITATION PERSONAL

In connection with this, we should always read and meditate over the word of God, with reference to ourselves and our own heart. This is deeply important, and I cannot press it too earnestly upon you. We are apt often to read the Word with reference to others. Parents read it in reference to their children, children for their parents, evangelists read it for their congregations, Sunday-school teachers

for their classes. Oh! this is a poor way of reading the Word; read so it will not profit. I say it deliberately and advisedly, the sooner it is given up, the better for your own souls. Read the word of God always with reference to your own heart, and when you have received the blessing in your own heart, you will be able to communicate it to others.

Whether you labour as evangelists, as pastors, or as visitors, superintendents of Sunday schools, or teachers, tract distributors, or in whatever other capacity you may seek to labour for the Lord, be careful to let the reading of the Word be with distinct reference to your own heart. Ask yourselves, How does this suit me, either for instruction, for correction, for exhortation, or for rebuke? How does this affect me? If you thus read, and get the blessing in your own soul, how soon will it flow out, to others.

READ IN FAITH

Another point. It is of the utmost moment in reading the word of God, that the reading should be accompanied with faith. "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." As with the preaching, so with the reading - it must be mixed with faith. Not simply reading it as you would read a story, which you may receive or not: not simply as a statement, which you may credit or not, or as an exhortation, to which you may listen or not; but as the revealed will of the Lord: that is, receiving it with faith. Received thus, it will nourish us, and we shall really reap benefit. Only in this way will it benefit us; and we shall gain from it health and strength, in proportion as we receive it with real faith.

BE DOERS OF THE WORD

Lastly, if God does bless us in reading His word, He expects that we should be obedient children, and that we should accept the Word as His will, and carry it into practice. If this be neglected, you will find that the reading of the Word, even if accompanied by prayer, meditation, and faith, will do you little good. God does expect us to be obedient children, and will have us practice what He has taught us. The Lord Jesus Christ says: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." And in the measure in which we carry out what our Lord Jesus taught, so in measure are we happy children. And in such measure only can we honestly look for help from the Father, even as we seek to carry out His will.

If there is one single point I would wish to have spread all over this country, and over the whole world, it is just this, that we should seek, beloved Christian friends, not to be hearers of the Word only, but doers of the Word. I doubt not that many of you have sought to do this already, but I speak particularly to those younger brethren and sisters who may not yet have learned the full force of this. Oh, seek to attend earnestly to this; it is of vast importance. Satan will seek with much earnestness to put aside the word of God; but let us seek to carry it out and to act upon it. The Word must be received as a legacy from God, which we have by the Holy Ghost.

THE FULLNESS OF THE REVELATION GIVEN IN THE WORD

And remember that, to the faithful reader of this blessed Word, it reveals all that we need to know of the Father - all that we need to know about the Lord Jesus Christ, all about the power of the Spirit, all about the world that lieth in the wicked one, all about the road to heaven, and the blessedness of the world to come. In this blessed book we have the whole gospel, and all rules necessary for our Christian

life and warfare. Let us see, then, that we study it with our whole heart, and with prayer, meditation, faith, and obedience.

PRAYER

The next point on which I will speak for a few moments, has been more or less referred to already; it is that of prayer. You might read the Word and seem to understand it very fully, yet, if you are not in the habit of waiting continually upon God, you will make little progress in the divine life. We have not naturally in us any good thing, and cannot expect, save by the help of God, to please Him. Therefore, it is the will of the Lord, that we should always own our dependence upon Him, and it becomes us to follow in prayer the earnestness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That blessed One gave us an example in this particular, He gave whole nights to prayer, and we find Him on the lonely mountain engaged by night in prayer. And as in every way He is to be an example to us, so, in particular, on this point, He is also an example to us. The old evil, corrupt nature is still in us, though we are born again; therefore we have to come in prayer to God for help. We have to cling to the power of the Mighty One. Concerning everything we have to pray. Not simply when great troubles come, when our house is on fire, or our beloved wife is on the point of death, or our dear children are laid down in sickness, not simply at such times, but also in little things. From the very early morning, let us make everything a matter of prayer, and let it be so throughout the day, and throughout our whole life.

A Christian lady said, lately, that thirty-five years ago she heard me speak on this subject in Devonshire; and that then I referred to praying about little things. I had said, that suppose a parcel came to us, and it should prove difficult to untie the knot, and you cannot cut it; then you should ask God to help you, even to untie the knot. I myself had forgotten the words, but she has remembered them, and the remembrance has been a great help to her again and again. So I would say to you, my beloved friends, there is nothing too small for prayer. In the simplest things connected with our daily life and walk, we should give ourselves to prayer; and we shall have the living, loving Lord Jesus to help us. Even in the most trifling matters I give myself to prayer, and often in the morning, even ere I leave my room, I have two or three answers to prayer in this way.

Young believers, in the very outset of the Divine life, learn, in childlike simplicity, to wait upon God for everything! Treat the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Friend, able and willing to help you in everything. How blessed it is to be carried in His loving arms all the day long! I would say, that the divine life of the believer is made up of a vast number of little circumstances and little things. Every day there come before us a variety of little trials, and if we seek to put them aside in our own strength and wisdom, we shall quickly find that we are confounded. But if, on the contrary, we take everything to God we shall be helped, and our way shall be made plain. Thus our life will be a happy life!

FAITH MUST COME FIRST

There are two passages in the word of God of the deepest moment to Christians, and I would therefore speak on them. The first is in 2 Peter i. 5: "Besides this, add to your faith virtue," etc. It is here supposed that we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because we are commanded to add to our faith virtue, and these other graces. The apostle Peter is addressing believers, and here tonight I am supposing that I am speaking to believers. Yet, peradventure, there may be some who are not believers. To you, if there be

any such I would say, you are sinners. You may be young in this life or you may be advanced in years; you may be very moral, or otherwise; but in the sight of God you are sinners. This you must, if you would be saved, realise and understand that you are sinners, and not Only so, but sinners deserving punishment. You are lost and have no power of your own to save yourselves. The world talks about turning over a new leaf, but that will not satisfy Divine justice. The record of your past sins stands against you, and must be blotted out.

What then? You are sinners, and sinners deserving of punishment, nothing but punishment. You must either suffer that eternal punishment yourselves, or obtain another to bear it. Well, the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to bear this punishment. He has borne it in our room and stead. He has suffered for us. And now the only one thing that God looks for from the sinner is, that we should put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and in Him alone, for the salvation of our souls. We must look entirely to Himself; we must look only to the blessed Lamb of God, who was nailed to the Cross. Whosoever trusteth in Him shall be saved. Let his sins be never so many, yet he shall have forgiveness for all his transgressions. He is born again - is regenerated through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be made a child of God, an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ. Thanks be to His name. "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son."

If we have believed in the Lord Jesus, we are, however, not to be satisfied with this, but to seek to add to our faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience and to patience Godliness.

COURAGE

"Add to your faith virtue." "Virtue" here means fortitude, or courage; implying that the very first thing after believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, is, to own our attachment to Him. You must stand boldly out and make confession of Him. Some dear children of God think we may keep our religion to ourselves; there is no use in bringing it before our friends, companions, or relations - no use getting into trouble with them about it. What is the result? The Lord Jesus Christ will not stand on our side to strengthen us, if we will not take our stand by Him. Weak we are, weak we must remain, as long as we are in this state. I do not say you will go to hell. But you are half-hearted, and the Master wants valiant soldiers. He looks for fortitude. He will have us let those around us know whose we are, honestly and openly. Therefore we ought to be decided for Christ; that is of the utmost moment. The more we come out from the world, the better it will be for us in the things of God. We shall be strengthened, and the bolder we are for Christ the happier will it be for ourselves. Let me impress this on the hearts of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ; and if they have not already done so, let them make confession of Christ.

KNOWLEDGE

"Add to your faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge." Here again we have something to learn. I have already spoken of the importance of reading and meditating on God's word; but here comes a special exhortation to add to your faith, knowledge. We are not to be satisfied with knowing that we are sinners, and that Christ is our Saviour but we must seek to make progress in knowledge. Why is this? Because to increase in knowledge, is to increase in the knowledge of God. And as we increase in this knowledge of Him, we learn more and more of His love; and that it is the very joy of His heart to do us

good. We see more and more what a lovely Being God is; and the result of this again, is, that we are satisfied with His dealings with us.

I have passed through very many trials, some of them of no ordinary character; yet I have rejoiced in God. For nearly ten years - from 1838 to 1848 - I had difficulty upon difficulty, scarcely anything but difficulty. But I had always the help of God, and always was joyous, even in the darkest day, because I knew that all came from God, my Father. On that account I say to you, seek to increase in knowledge; and then although there may fall upon you trial and affliction, even heavy trial, deep affliction, yet if you can say, "It is from my Father, my loving Father; from Him who spared not His Son for me, and from Him who hath said that He will make all things work together for good; having freely given up Jesus for me, He will freely give me all things; therefore this trial must be good for me, else He would not suffer it to befall me." You can easily see how ill such a state of mind, we can pass through these trials; and even in the midst of them we may have calmness and peace, and even holy heavenly joy. Thus we shall be able to meet them. That is the result of being really acquainted with God. And the only way to get this knowledge is by diligent study of the Word, and by the teaching of the Spirit from that Word. Let us, therefore, aim after this knowledge, and not be satisfied with the simple belief that we shall get to heaven.

TEMPERANCE

The apostle next says, add to your faith temperance. Now this is, not merely abstaining from excess in drinking - though it does mean that; but self-control generally is here the meaning of this word. That is, regarding everything, whether meat or drink, or any other thing, that we do not give way to the abuse of anything God has given us. It is here, used as regarding our temper, appetites, and deportment generally. Because by the way in which we conduct ourselves, or behave ourselves, do we glorify God or dishonour Him. The world is watching us, to see how so-and-so, who has become a Christian, behaves himself. And if they see us walk inconsistently, then do they speak against our Master; while if, on the other hand, they see us walk consistently, they are compelled to give honour to our God.

PATIENCE

"And to temperance, patience;" that is, to be satisfied with the will of God. If we have this contentment, we shall be able to endure tribulation and suffering, and even bereavement and sickness, satisfied that it is for the best. If we are the children of God, we are but strangers and pilgrims here. This is not our home, we here have no abiding city; therefore we heed not the troubles or difficulties by the way, they will soon pass. Let us therefore aim after showing, by our quiet, patient demeanour, that we are satisfied with God.

GODLINESS

Add to your faith Godliness, that is, the habit of referring everything to God. That we pray about everything and do everything as seeing Him who is above; that we walk as confident that God is our strength; that we walk by day and by night, as in the sight of God; in short, that we walk in holy, precious fellowship with God; that we remember that He is before us, and with us; that the Father's eye is upon us, and that we seek to be guided and directed in everything by Him. Oh that we might take up the meaning of all this, and carry it into our lives!

Now, my beloved Christian friends, is it your calm, quiet purpose to aim after all this? If so, you may be certain that God will give you more power to follow Him. God allows us, for His own wise purposes, to have our lot in this life cast amidst darkness in many respects. But think not of that; remember, we are getting nearer the end. The day is drawing near when the Lord Jesus Christ will come. I do not say by this that I can specify the time, or that it will be such and such a date; I know nothing of the precise time. But this is certain, we are getting nearer, - nearer the end. Nearer the day when the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in glory to call His waiting saints to meet Him in the air.

How the thought ought to warm our hearts, and to fill us with a longing to serve Him, and to be like Him. If others are cold, then let us seek to warm them. If others are foolish, let us seek to teach them. If fire be lacking in others, let us, His servants, be burning coals to set them on fire. Let us remember, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Oh, the blessedness of bearing much love to others, instead of receiving it only; of warming others instead of being warmed only; of teaching others instead of being taught ourselves only. Oh, therefore, beloved in Christ, let it be a matter of great moment to you, that you aim after Godliness, living near to God in this life, that we may enjoy the blessedness of being living witnesses for Him, Let us seek that we may be made burning coals; and if all the brethren and sisters here were thus set on fire, how soon should we set Mildmay Park on fire. Then, would it not extend to Hackney? And then it would light up London itself. In helping to bless others we shall be greatly blessed in our own souls; and the fire thus kindled will burn in our own hearts. The passage which follows this contains so much that I will rather leave it for our next meeting.

In seeking to lend a helping hand to my beloved fellow-disciples, especially the younger ones, I came, at our last meeting, to a portion of Scripture containing deeply important instruction, in connection with this subject. You will find it in 2 Pet. i., from the fifth verse. I will just read a few verses, for the sake of the connection, up to the verse at which I left off.

I suppose, of course, that those whom I address are trusting in the atoning blood of the Lamb alone, for the salvation of their souls; but if any be present who know not the Saviour, may God in the riches of His grace stir them up to see the state in which they are by nature. We are all sinners deserving punishment, and nothing but punishment, in the state in which we are by nature; and the only way we can escape it, is by having

A SUBSTITUTE

to bear the punishment. This substitute God has provided in the person of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who has been punished in our room and stead, and whose perfect obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, has been accepted in the room of sinners, who, by trusting in Him alone, can obtain the salvation of their souls. All here present who have not yet trusted in Him, may cast themselves upon the mercy of God, by accepting what He has provided in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Thus they would become like us, who have obtained forgiveness; would be delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son; would be brought from darkness into light, and obtain peace to their souls; would be brought on the road to heaven, and made children of God, and joint heirs with Christ; and would have the bright, blessed prospect of glory; and, while on the road to their home, would have a part in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, and who is coming again to receive us to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also.

POINTS ALREADY CONSIDERED

Now, as I said before, I suppose that all present have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; then are you doing as Peter writes, "Add to your faith virtue?" Again I mention that this word "virtue" is used in the sense of courage or fortitude, particularly implying that we are to make confession of Christ, and to stand out for Him, and boldly own Him before a wicked world.

Then, as I already observed, we are also to increase in knowledge, specially in the knowledge of the revelation which God has been pleased to make of Himself and His dear Son in the Holy Scriptures. This precious book shows to us the vanity of this world, and the blessedness and reality of heavenly things, and the joys that await us in the Father's house.

"And to knowledge, temperance." This means self-control; not merely to abstain from excess in drinking. It means far more, referring to our temper, way of life, our speech, and whole deportment; to be living in the world as becomes the children of God. And to this add patience; quietly waiting for God in the hour of trial and deep affliction, and expecting Him to deliver us.

And to this add Godliness; that is, the habit in which everything is brought to God, and referred to Him; in which we seek to walk to the praise and honour and glory of God, and at all times and under all circumstances to make this our business - our especial business - to live for God and under the eye of God; and that we do not turn away our eyes from God, but that we seek to go straight on, walking with God all the day long; living, speaking, acting for Him; cultivating the precious habit in which we walk with and live for God.

Thus far we proceeded on the last evening. Now we come to

BROTHERLY KINDNESS;

that is, "the love of the brethren." That especially is to be aimed after, and if this is wanting, there is very much wanting. The heavenly Father looks for love among His children, whom He has loved with an eternal and unchangeable love. He would have us love one another. And if we do not love the brethren, where is the proof that we love God? God does specially look for this love, and He would have us add to all other graces, particularly this grace - the love of the brethren.

And more, we are to add to all this,

CHARITY;

that is, universal love. Not merely are we to love the children of God, but to love those who are not of us, and who do not love us. We are to love those who do not care in the least for us. We are to love those who do not walk with us on the road to heaven, and whom we have never even seen or heard of. We are to love everyone of the human family; that is the will of our heavenly Father regarding us.

He would have the heart of His children so large as to take in all; and then we have what is commanded - universal love, which will manifest itself in seeking to do good to all our fellow-men.

We shall seek to do them good in every possible way, but specially in striving after the salvation of their souls. For this is what our heavenly Father teaches us, when He causes His sun to shine on the evil as well as on the good, and when His rain descends on the just and the unjust. By all this He would teach us to love everyone, even our enemies themselves. "To brotherly kindness, therefore, add charity" - love to all.

THE RESULT OF THIS - FRUIT

Now comes the next thing; what is the practical result of all this? It is fruit. "For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

If we seek to "add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience Godliness, and to Godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity"; then, if these things be in us and abound, "we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is impossible to lead an idle life, if these things be found in us; for we shall be seeking to bring glory to God, and it is impossible that we should not bear fruit. If those things be found in us, it is impossible to stand still in the divine life; we shall surely make progress to the praise and honour and glory of God. We shall bear fruit. And the result will be that we shall not merely bear fruit thirty-fold, not merely forty-fold, or forty-five-fold, not even fifty, fifty-five, or sixty-fold only; but there is the possibility in this latter part of the nineteenth century, to bring forth fruit eighty or ninety-fold; and who shall tell us there is not even the possibility of bearing fruit a hundred-fold? But whether we do bear fruit to this extent or not; it should be our aim to bear fruit abundantly; and if we aim at sixty or seventy-fold, we may have a hundred-fold.

THE CONTRARY RESULT

But now notice:- "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." That is the state of the man who does not seek to add to his faith these graces. "He that lacketh these things" (that is, he that neglecteth these things) "cannot see afar off" (that is, is dim-sighted).

It must be so, my brethren. He may have good natural sight, needing no spectacles; he may have clear judgment about business matters, and a thoroughly clear judgment of all temporal matters of this life; yet, if he does not seek to add to his faith all these things, he is dim-sighted, he has not spiritual judgment or discernment, and all his worldly wisdom is nothing. He becomes a hindrance to his fellow disciples instead of a helper; and instead of a counsellor to his younger brethren in Christ, he becomes a darkener of counsel. How deeply important, not to get into such a state, and therefore, my young brethren and sisters in Christ, I beseech you not to allow yourselves to become spiritually blind.

"And hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." What a sad thing if, after all that God has done for you, in bringing you to see that you are by nature sinners, in helping you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, so that your sins have been forgiven, and you have been delivered from the powers of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son, - how if, after all this, you become blind, or dim-sighted, and your heavenly vision becomes obscured!

If our new light were to be darkened - those eyes which, by the power of the Spirit, have been enlightened - how sad it would be! If by reason of carelessness or worldly-mindedness, we should lose this spiritual sight, oh, how great the darkness would be! God's saints are all in danger of this. Not only until we have been believers ten, twenty, or thirty years, but as long as we are in the body, there is this danger. How deeply important, then, for us to take measures to be kept from this spiritual blindness!

Remember, then, that "he that lacketh these things is blind." He has not the mind of God; he has more or less the mind of the world; and if you bring certain things before him, such as the importance of prayer, that man will probably say you are too religious, too pious; he cannot understand you. Why is all this? Why should a man who has been forgiven and placed on the road to heaven, whose eyes have been opened to spiritual things, become thus blind? It is by neglecting to add to his faith these graces, he has become dim-sighted concerning the heavenly realities; he has been spiritually blinded, and has forgotten the state from which he was delivered. How deeply important, therefore, that we should cultivate these graces! Very many of the dear children of God, who, at the commencement of their divine life saw clearly their state, that they were sinners, and deserving punishment, and who, through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, by faith in Him, had peace, and had known the enjoyment and blessedness of fellowship with God, by getting careless and worldly-minded, and by living to a greater or less degree under the influence of this world, have at last forgotten that their sins were all forgiven, and that they are the children of God.

Thus they lose all the blessed enjoyment of their position, as children of God and heirs of heaven; and what is the result of all this? They more and more settle down in this world, and become less and less spiritually minded, and become more and more lovers of this world.

What a sad state is this, and oh! my beloved brethren, may God keep us all from falling into it. Therefore it is that I do desire to warn you against ceasing to add to your faith all those graces: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, Godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity. All these things are to be added.

And now, "Wherefore, the rather?" That is, because of all that has been said, we are to aim after "giving all diligence, to

MAKE OUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE,"

Have we all done this? Is it true of you all, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, that you have made your calling and election sure? Is it as certain, with you all, that you will go to heaven, as if you were there already?

"But," you say, "how can we do this? "Just by attending to the points brought before us in the previous verses. For if we attend to all these things, then we shall make our calling and election sure. We shall have the assurance in Our own soul, that we are the children of God; that we have received the forgiveness of sins, and that our Father loves us; that we are on the road to heaven, and that we have before us the bright and blessed prospect of glory, and are daily getting nearer home"; and that we shall most assuredly reach heaven at last.

In order to have this blessed assurance, let us, my beloved brethren, aim after all these things, that we may make our calling and election sure.

There is such a thing as doing this. I should be doing dishonour to my God, and failing in my duty if I did not bear witness today that I have made my calling and election sure. After having been about fifty years a believer, I bear testimony that I know I am a child of God, that I have been far given, and that I am on the road to heaven. And although, in myself, nothing but a poor, weak, miserable sinner, and though if I had only committed the fiftieth part of the sins I have been guilty of, I know I should deserve punishment - nothing but punishment; yet, notwithstanding all this, I am as certain of going to heaven as if I were there already.

Why, why is all this certainty? Because God, by His Spirit, declares, "Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life." I take God at His word, in childlike simplicity, and hence I have the enjoyment of His promise.

And although I am but a poor, miserable sinner, deserving punishment, yet I know I shall have everlasting life through Christ, and not only shall have everlasting life, but I have it even now. Therefore I have made my calling and election sure.

Moreover, I know by the grace of God that I am not a stony-ground hearer. Why do I know this? Because, having heard the Word I received it, and the cares of this world have not choked it; the persecutions of this world have not dried it up; in the hour of temptation I still had the word of God in my heart, and did not take my eye away from the cross; and therefore I know I am

NOT A STONY-GROUND HEARER

I am not a hearer only, but a doer, in some little measure, of the Word; and though I am weak, I can say that I know I have made my calling and election sure. If, after all this, my beloved brethren, you are not sure of it, oh, be not satisfied till the matter is settled.

And what is the result of all this? The beggarly elements of this world affect me very little, because I have heavenly joy in my heart. I do not care for the money, the rank, or the honour of this evil world, and all its other allurements which attract many. I have something better - better far. The heavenly things are the best lever to lift your minds out of this world into heaven. Therefore aim after this certainty as to heaven, and it will raise you above the things of this life.

It is deeply important, my beloved younger brethren and sisters, to make a good beginning in this way, and to continue thus, and then your joy and assurance will increase more and more. Your path will be as that of the just, which "shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Why should it not be so? We ought to increase. You and I are neither prophets nor apostles, yet our path ought, as that of the just, to "shine more and more unto the perfect day."

DILIGENCE

In order that it may be thus, let us give heed to this, "Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence" (mark that word "diligence") "to make your calling and election sure." Why so? "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." If you go on in this way, the world will not be able to say, "Look at the drunkard, who calls himself a Christian! Look at that thief who calls himself a Christian! or that idle, slothful man, see how he behaves to his wife; or see how she neglects her family and husband, and yet calls herself a Christian woman."

None shall be able to say such things of the child of God, so long as he continues to walk in these ways of which I have been speaking; and thus reproach shall not be brought upon the name of the Lord, and "if ye do these things, you shall never fall." And you shall never bring dishonour, but rather honour and glory to God.

AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE

"For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We shall be like vessels under full sail, entering the port. That is what we should aim after, "an abundant entrance." Not like a house on fire, from which there is the possibility of bringing out perhaps a chair or a table, snatched, as it were, from the fire; "a brand plucked from the burning."

In this way some children of God escape at the last, content if they simply get into heaven and no more. But this ought not to be the case with you and me. We should be like vessels in full sail entering the port, having an abundant entrance. Let us aim after this, calmly and quietly bidding adieu to this evil world, joyously waiting for the coming of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord abundantly.

After this we must also aim, so to live as that we may not have to look back in deep sorrow that we have loved the world." Let us keep this before us, and especially you, my beloved younger brethren and sisters in Christ, while the middle-aged and the aged ought to remember it too; that you have but one brief life to spend for God, and surely this one brief life ought to be spent to the honour, and praise, and glory of God.

I have one more passage, full of deeply important matter to which I wish to direct your attention, by the help of God. You will find it in Eph. vi., and this, for the present, will be the last portion to which I shall direct your attention, except the Lord on Friday evening should lead me to anything else. I shall now only enter upon it, and shall not be able to finish it tonight; but will continue it on Friday evening.

The portion is verses 10 to 18 of chapter vi. This passage, for the first four or five years after my conversion, was one from which, when I came to read it, there was a kind of shrinking in my mind; because I read it merely as a commandment, and found myself reprov'd by it; therefore I shrank from it.

One Lord's-day, about forty-five years ago, I awoke early in the morning, about five o'clock. I felt tired - very tired, having had a great deal to do on the day previous. I felt I should like to spend another hour in bed; but it came to my mind, "This is the Lord's day, and there can be nothing better than to rise and give myself to prayer and meditation." I did so, and in the course of my reading I came to this sixth chapter of Ephesians. I began reading; I soon saw that it was full of the gospel - blessedly full of the gospel. It pleased God to bless it greatly to my soul that day, and, ever since, this portion has been particularly dear to my heart.

I desire now, as God may help me, to bring before you what the Holy Ghost would teach us in these verses.

"Finally," the apostle says, as if he meant, Now, after all I have said, let us sum it up in the following verses: "My brethren." This word "brethren" is to be especially noticed. As if he meant to say, this is a word for believers, and specially for them. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

TRUE STRENGTH

The first point here is, for the beloved fellow-disciples never for a moment to suppose that they have, or can have, any strength of their own. And, because they are converted, and are not now dead in trespasses and sins, and have been brought from death unto life, yet they are not to suppose that they have any strength of their own. "Be strong in the Lord." In ourselves we are utterly weak, and in ourselves we remain weak as we are by nature, our strength is in the Lord; and by looking to God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive wisdom, strength, help, and, in short, everything we can possibly need as we pass through this vale of tears.

Therefore do we especially need this exhortation, "Be strong in the Lord." We cannot fight, we can do nothing of ourselves; we have no might nor strength of our own. And if any one should say he thinks he has any strength or power in himself, I would say, "My brother, you are mistaken; you have no such thing."

And this we have to remember to the very last moment of our life. I desire day by day, and hour by hour, to remember this, and I request all of you to remember it, that you may never suppose you have any strength or wisdom of your own. If you do so, you are neglecting the resources laid up in Jesus Christ; and moreover if you do so, you will not make use of the wisdom, power, and strength which God has laid up for us in the hour of our weakness, in the person of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore is this exhortation much needed, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

The next time we shall see, if the Lord will, the deep importance of this exhortation to put on the whole armour of God. But now I wish you to notice that it is of great moment that we should

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

Not simply the breastplate; not simply the helmet; not simply taking the shield; but the whole armour of God. And these words, "put on" the whole armour, are to indicate to us, to make use of the armour. It is to be "put on." It is one thing to know the armour which God has provided. We may know all about it very intimately, but it is a different thing to put it on. Yet, God has provided his armour, in order that we may put it on, and thus be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

If we do not put it on, then it will profit us nothing. Just as it is with the gospel. God provides it for us; He has made this provision in order that we may escape punishment; and Christ says that they who believe, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Yet if poor sinners do not receive Christ, if they reject Him, and go on trusting in self or living in carelessness and utter indifference as to the things of God, then all this blessed provision for them, through the sufferings and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, will profit them nothing. They must appropriate it, by God's grace, to themselves.

Now it is precisely so with the saints. They will not profit by the armour, unless they put it on. But, one says, "I am so weak." What then? You stand all the more in need of it; cry, "Oh my Father, I am Thy weak

child; help me to put on Thy armour." God fill accept thy cry, and He will help the weak one who so cries.

There is an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the sovereignty of God, which is plainly revealed, and on the other hand, the "will of man." We have no power of our own, and yet we are responsible persons. We are commanded distinctly to receive and obey the gospel; and if we do not, yet we are responsible.

If, however, we feel our own utter inability, then let us go to God, and say to Him, "I am weak and sinful, and cannot receive the gospel. Help Thou me." If we do this, we shall be helped, as God is willing to do so and willing to bless us, if we only seek Him.

So it is with the armour of God. If we are weak, let us say, "Father, see Thy weak child. Yet I wish to put on this armour. Help thou me." You will find that He is willing to help us.

But why is it so important that we put on the whole armour of God, and not a part only? For this very reason, that we should be able to

STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL

There are many of those who say, with the ungodly world, that there is no such person as the devil. But the Holy Ghost reveals the fact that there is such a person. I am as thoroughly convinced of this in my inmost soul, as I am convinced of the reality of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and of the existence of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the salvation of all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But while it is true that there is such a person, and while it is true that he who is against us is mighty, - very mighty, yet this is also true that He that is for us is still more mighty; and that in the riches of His grace He has created and provided for His poor weak children the whole armour, whereby they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. And as long as we make use of this whole armour, we shall find how ready He is to help us in all our weakness and helplessness.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places." We have a conflict, but it is not a conflict of this world. It is not according to the ideas of this world. As, for instance, when in an earthly conflict soldier wrestles against soldier, flesh and blood against flesh and blood. Not thus is our warfare. It is of a spiritual character, and altogether against spiritual forces; "against principalities and against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." In a word, against the power of the evil one.

Here we stop, and from this, if God will, we shall go on next Friday evening to consider the whole armour of God. And those who come here, I affectionately advise to consider it before you come. Read the passage, and seek to meditate upon it with reference to your own heart, and try to see how far you understand these verses.

Thus our meditations, when we come together, will be all the more profitable. I have it particularly laid on my heart to say a word on this portion of Scripture, which I have found repeatedly to be food to my own soul, and which I trust may be also made profitable to others.

The portion from which I have it laid on my heart to speak a few words of counsel and advice, especially to the younger brethren and sisters in Christ, you will find in Eph. vi, 10-18.

I have already observed the deep importance of never, in the least degree, relying on our own power and energy, or upon our past experience, or upon what we think we can accomplish in the things of God; but rather throughout to distrust ourselves, even to the very close of our earthly pilgrimage, and only to rely upon the power and wisdom of God Himself, so that in His power and might we may go forward in the battle.

WE MUST PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR of GOD;

and regarding this, we have observed the deep importance of putting on the whole armour of God. Every part of the armour which God Himself has been pleased to provide for His children, is absolutely, in order that we may be fully furnished for the conflict. And for this very purpose has required the armour been provided, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. That adversary is very subtle and crafty, and he is ever watching that he may get an advantage over us. In order to lay still greater stress on this, the apostle, by the guidance of the Holy Ghost, proceeds to say, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood." The battle is not that of army against army, or man against man, as in this world, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Here I observe particularly, the deep importance of ever keeping before us, that we have really and truly to fight against the powers of darkness. And if at any time any of us should, through the subtlety of Satan, yield to the temptation that there is no such thing as a real personal devil, let them be aware that that is just one of his chief devices, in order to throw the child of God off his guard, so that he may the more easily get power over him.

THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION

Verily, there is such a being as the devil. And he is mighty, as well as experienced. But also, for our comfort, let us keep this before us, that greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us. And therefore with courage we may go forth against the powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places. As long as we recognise our own weakness and impotency, and depend upon God, we shall be helped even against these powers.

Thus far we have already proceeded. Now,

"WHEREFORE TAKE UNTO YOU."

Wherefore; that is to say, because the conflict is what it is, and because it is what has been described, because we do not fight against man, or against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness, and against spiritual evil powers, "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand

in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” For this very purpose the armour is provided for us, that we may be able to withstand and finally to overcome.

Now let not any dear child of God suppose, as there is at times a danger of supposing, that because the conflict is what it is - because it is spiritual, and because our enemies are so many and so mighty, that, therefore, it is utterly useless to attempt to fight against the powers of darkness. Not so. Let us go with good courage to the conflict. The will of the Lord is that we should

"BE OF GOOD COURAGE";

and under whatever circumstances of danger, perplexity, or of trial, the child of God may be placed, let him always be of "good courage." Who shall harm us, if God is for us? If He is on our side, who shall then withstand us?

But let us never trust in self, else we shall quickly find how weak we are. Especially let us never begin to reason with the devil; he is too much for us. The will of God is, never, never, never, under any circumstance, to reason with the tempter. He who begins to reason, is certain to fall; because we have ever to keep before us who the devil is, and what power he has; and, therefore, if we begin to reason, we are sure to be overcome.

THAT OLD SERPENT WHICH IS THE DEVIL

We know not how long the chief of the evil spirits has been in existence; but we know that he was in existence at the creation of the world, and was the originator of evil. Therefore, from the time he deceived our first parents, he has reasoned with a great number of people, and has thus gained a vast experience. Think of all this vast experience, and of all the wiles he has learned, and you will see how absurd it is to attempt to reason with Satan. God's blessed Word is enough, and that is the only thing he cannot stand against. But if you begin to reason with the devil, it is certain that you cannot stand.

Never, then, attempt to reason; especially you, my younger brethren and sisters in Christ. Learn at the outset of the divine life that you must not reason, and that, if you do, you will fall. When tempted, take the blessed book, and say, "My Lord says so-and-so, and I believe it;" and in child-like simplicity rest upon it. Satan cannot stand against that.

"Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

Notice further that word

"EVIL DAY"

What is particularly meant is the day of temptation; that is the evil day. And on that day we are to take comfort in the knowledge that God is our helper. But in a certain sense the whole of this life is an evil day, because of the power of Satan, and because of the world which surrounds us. The devil is ever on the watch to get at us, and therefore in a certain sense the whole time we are in the body is the evil day. The whole armour of God is given to us, not to be used on this particular day, or that, but to be

worn during the whole pilgrimage of this life. We may have fought very successfully for a time, but still we are to keep it on.

In the armies of this world, you all know how it is - battle after battle has been fought, and success has been gained. What then? The armour is put off and now, the soldiers rest. But not thus with the armour of God. The whole pilgrimage is a time of war; the conflict ceases not, but must be maintained throughout life.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

But to you who are not alive spiritually, who are dead in trespasses and sins and have no conflict, I say, affectionately, it is the slumber of death which is upon you. The life which you now live will be terminated, unless you are awakened, in eternal spiritual death. Therefore if you are not awakened, seek with all earnestness of purpose to be made to know your own state, and to seek to become alive through Jesus Christ.

The gospel is yet preached to you - the door of mercy is still open wide. The very fact that you are here today shows, that the gospel door is open yet. Oh, press into the door - believe the gospel - obey the commandment to receive the gospel, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, for the salvation of your souls!

Then, if you do so, you will, in the riches of God's grace, receive the forgiveness of your sins; you will be regenerated, and, although you were dead in trespasses and sins, you will instantaneously be made a child of God, an heir of God, joint-heir with Christ; be brought on the road to heaven, and have the bright and blessed prospect of everlasting life before you. Then, and only then, you will know something practically and experimentally of the conflict against the powers of darkness.

It is to those, then, who are believers, and who know what the conflict is, that I speak this evening. And to you beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, but especially the younger brethren and sisters, I say, never allow yourselves to be at ease with regard to the conflict.

It is written here,

"AND HAVING DONE ALL TO STAND."

Oh, how deeply important it is to notice that we must be prepared to stand firm. Again and again do we see the child of God who has set out well, and who has continued for a time to run well, and who has given up the world, with its habits and customs, its passions and pursuits; has renounced all these, and has rejoiced the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the hearts of God's dear children; has gone on for a year or two, and then he begins to hanker after this world; then he begins to take his ease in the conflict; another year or two, and he is as much in the world as ever he was.

What a sad, sad, sad case is this; yet how frequently do we see it occur. To avoid it, if I may be permitted to use my experience, I say to the beloved children of God, Be satisfied with nothing short of this, that you are going on in the self-same decided way for God as you did at the beginning. Continue to keep on the armour of God, and say, By His grace I will stand.

Let it never be said of you, That man began well, and has not gone on well. Let it be so that any who knew us in 1830, and now sees us in 1875, can say of us, Well, after forty-five years have passed away, that man is as decided as ever.

I ask myself, and answer it as before God, and I ask you, my brethren also, to answer before God, How is it with us? Are you as decided as at the beginning? If not, there is something wrong. Having been very decided for God is not enough; we must be so still, even continually; ever resisting the powers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places.

Let us, then, never settle down at ease to enjoy the victory. That is never the case in this world. There is no permanent victory here; it is far off in yonder world, in the bright blessed eternity which is awaiting us. We shall have victory and rest there, but here, in this life, we have to fight - fight on in the conflict of life.

Now let us consider the armour itself.

"HAVING YOUR LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH."

To most of you, my dear Christian friends, I scarcely need to say, that we have here to keep before us, not the common English soldier with his firearms and modern equipment, but soldiers as they were in those early days, and especially the Roman soldiers. The nature of their armour and warfare we have to keep before us.

Now at that time it was a matter of great importance to the soldiers to have a girdle to gird themselves. By means of this girdle the soldier braced himself for the march and the conflict. The clothes were thus tied close to the body, in order that the soldier might not be hindered in his marching, nor in his fighting, as the fighting often consisted in one man fighting against another man.

Now, in the spiritual conflict, what have we for a girdle? It is the truth of God. This brings before us the fact, that, just in the measure in which we hold the blessed truths of God's word, so in measure, and only so in measure, are we ready for the conflict.

Every particle of error hinders us in our spiritual conflict. We are helped in the measure in which we adhere to the truth of God. And while the temptation in the case of the young disciple may be to say, "I know I am a child of God, and that Jesus Christ has saved me, therefore what does it matter whether I understand this or that particular truth or not, or this or that particular doctrine or not," yet it is a matter of great moment. Because, in such a degree as we understand the truth, so shall we be able to stand in the hour of conflict, and so much the less shall we be hindered in this our conflict.

We ought to hold the truth in all its parts - every particle of the truth as revealed to us; and we ought not to have our favourite parts, and only those of God's word to which we pay particular attention, to the neglect of other equally important parts. And just in proportion as we seek to know the whole revealed truth, so shall we be strengthened, as with a girdle, for the conflict.

THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

This part of the armour of a Roman soldier was generally made of a piece of iron or brass, and which particularly covered and protected the vital parts, such as the heart, lungs, and liver. A very important thing, then, was the "breast plate," or piece of iron or brass, covering, as it did, the vital parts of the Roman soldier. Now, we have to ask ourselves, in connection with this, What is this? What have we for a breast-plate to protect us?

One or another says, we must live a righteous life. True, we have to seek to live a righteous life; but this is not the point here. It is this, that we seek continually, as poor weak sinners, to hide ourselves in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this spiritual conflict there is nothing so important, as that from the very beginning of the spiritual course, we begin as poor miserable sinners, trusting alone in the righteousness of Christ, - the righteousness which the Blessed One has wrought out for sinners, the righteousness in which alone we trust before God. This the only ground on which we expect God to help us, to answer our prayers, and deliver us from the difficulties with which we meet in our spiritual conflict.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

It is, then, deeply important to see that we are poor sinners, miserable and weak in ourselves, but that Jesus is our all in all; not only thus at the beginning, but thus we must go on; not only two or three years, not even five, ten, or twenty years, and then trust in our own merits, but that we continue as long as we live to depend solely on the righteousness of Christ. It is not only at our conversion that this is so deeply important, when we are made new creatures and enter upon this warfare; but it is equally important at all times in our spiritual life. So that when the devil says - as he will say-" Do you expect to get to heaven, you miserable sinner? You do not deserve it. Look at what you have done! No such thing; you need not expect it, you will not get there." When he says that, what is the answer to be? "It is true that I have sinned; yet for Christ Jesus' sake - poor miserable sinner as I am - in His righteousness, I shall yet be in heaven." What is the result of this? You rise!

The devil seems to have you down, and seeks to give you your death blow; yet you rise! He seems to have obtained the mastery over you, and yet you rise again, because you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and not in self, and you stand before God not in yourself, but in Christ. And though a poor miserable sinner, yet through Jesus, who makes you clean in His blood, you know you will get to heaven at last.

When you thus go to Christ, and take refuge in His righteousness, the devil is outwitted. Therefore remember particularly to have on this breastplate.

If the Roman soldier had not put on his breastplate how easily he would have been cut down when his breast was unprotected. So it is with us; it is important that we should put on "the breastplate of righteousness."

"YOUR FEET SHOD WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE."

What is the meaning of this? I invited you last Tuesday evening, to meditate on these verses; you may have considered it, but now consider it again with me. What is the meaning of this "your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"?

These soldiers, of whom we have been speaking, did not go bare-footed into the battle; for if so, and it were man wrestling against man, how easily they might slip and fall down while fighting one against the other. Neither did they wear sandals, which would not have afforded full protection to the feet. The common thing amongst these soldiers was to wear strong boots.

Many of my friends may remember the name of one of the Roman emperors, Caligula, which means, "little boot." He was called thus because he became a soldier when very young, and his feet were so small that none of the ordinary soldiers' boots would suit him, and he had to have little boots made on purpose for him. I simply remind you of this to show that the common practice amongst the soldiers was, to wear boots, in order that they might be the better helped with regard to their warfare.

Boots also were of especial importance, on account of marching. The roads at that time were rough and rugged, and thus these boots were of great service in the war, as they had to march in rank against the enemy. And so our spiritual boots protect us when on the rough march of life, as also in the hour of conflict. We, who are the children of God, have a provision made for us in this respect, and it is the gospel of peace which God has provided for us, that we may be able to march homewards through the rough paths of life, and even to stand in the hour of conflict.

What is this preparation of the gospel of peace? It means, we are the children of God, and we are no longer at enmity with God, but are at peace with Him. Our sins are forgiven in the Lord Jesus Christ. God is well pleased with us for Christ, His dear Son's sake; and we, having no longer any fear, are at peace with God.

That is the preparation of the gospel of peace, with regard to our spiritual conflict and also with regard to our homeward march. Hold it fast; although thou art a poor, miserable sinner, yet thou art forgiven for Christ's sake. "Through whom we have the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Though I am a poor miserable sinner, yet the heart of the Father loves me, and I am on the road to heaven, where I shall certainly be at last.

Let the child of God hold fast this hope, and this persuasion of his security, as given in the simple statement of the gospel, and by this he will be able to pursue his march heavenwards, and in the hour of conflict he will be able to stand manfully.

All this by having the preparation of the gospel of peace! How deeply important, then, to have clear views of God's gospel, and that we should receive it simply as the gospel, and not in any way mix it up with our own doings or experience. Some would seem to act as if they are to do what they can, and, what they cannot, the Lord will do. Far be it from us to have such thoughts. He and He alone must do all for us. By His atoning death on the cross, He has borne the punishment due to us for our sins, sins which deserved punishment - and nothing but punishment - and has brought us to this blessed hope and trust that all our sins are forgiven; that God is well pleased with us for Christ's sake, and that, sinners though we are, yet He now delights in us for His dear Son's sake, and He is willing to help us in all our

conflicts for Christ's sake. Thus we experience that joy and peace, which will help us on the march to heaven, and in the hour of spiritual conflict. So then let us make much of this preparation of the gospel of peace, which is spiritually the protection of our feet, even as the old Roman soldiers were protected by their strong boots.

"ABOVE ALL, TAKING THE SHIELD OF FAITH

wherewith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." As the words stand here in our translation, one or the other might suppose that those words "above all" indicate that it is of the first importance to have this shield of faith. Now I do not at all undervalue this shield of faith, but only to point out that this "above all" does not mean that it is of more importance than the other parts of the armour. The meaning of it is, "in addition to all;" "that is, not leaving it out.

We have already observed the importance of faith but this again brings before us the deep importance of exercising faith; and this not only on this particular point, or on the other particular point, but our faith should be exercised on the whole revealed truth of God. In regard to all that He has said as to this world, or the world to come, as well as the first point, that of believing on His dear Son whom He hath sent into the world. We have to aim after this, that we should increasingly and truly, and with childlike simplicity, seek to take God at His Word. That is exercising faith, which is here called the "shield of faith."

Now in the case of the Roman soldiers, it was deeply important to be protected by the shield. You all know how important this shield was to ward off dangers, such as arrows and blows of the sword. But it was also of great service in warding off darts. So in the spiritual conflict this shield of faith is given, that the child of God should be able to stand against the fiery darts of the wicked - that is, the wicked one - the darts of Satan.

"FIERY DARTS."

They are called fiery darts, because they are so painful and so pernicious. We all know, in our own experience, the exceedingly painful nature of these fiery darts, and the only way to overcome them is by using the shield of faith. Exceedingly great temptations are often met with, which tend to make us distrust the love and power of our Father; and the only means of meeting these is by faith. The best way to illustrate the meaning of faith, as applied to these temptations, is just to give one or two instances.

For instance, here is a child of God: suppose that he has been regenerated, and for some time has fought manfully against the evil one, and the allurements of this world. But after a time, perhaps two or three years, he begins to be less watchful. What then? He goes back again, and begins to love this present world, and soon the temptation comes. "Well, I am afraid I shall not be successful, and after all I shall lose the battle." You all know that a child of God may thus be tempted, and how wretched he will be, till he uses the shield of faith to quench this fiery dart of doubt and mistrust. How shall we use the shield of faith? It is stated regarding the children of God, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." This is true regarding all the children of God; and it is true regarding you. How quickly, when this is used with childlike simplicity, does it quench that fiery dart.

Or in the temptation which sometimes comes to the child of God, when he is tempted to think that he may, after all, be lost; how does the word of God suit this? Simply by believing what it declares, "None

shall be able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." I am one of His sheep, and therefore I cannot be lost. How this will quench the fiery darts of the devil, and give us joy instead of sorrow!

TEMPORAL TRIALS

Now one or two points regarding temporal matters, where faith is also of deep importance. Suppose one who has all his life earned his bread by toil. He gets on towards sixty, and presently will be past it. Now Satan begins to trouble him, and says, "You are getting old now; soon there will be nothing remaining for you but the union or the workhouse."

How wretched and miserable a child of God is made by this; but by using the shield of faith he will be able to quench it. "If my Father has cared for me when young, surely He will continue to care for me when old, and when sick, even as in the past. Or as He says in the Word, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." How quickly this temptation will be quenched. I have seen many of God's dear children who were thus troubled.

AN ILLUSTRATION

One instance I remember distinctly, although it occurred many years ago. It was that of an aged widow, a child of God, who had lived very consistently. She had worked hard with her hands in youth, and now in her old age she had begun to say, I shall have to go to the workhouse. She had some money which she had saved of her past earnings, and she said, "When this is gone I can earn no more, and I shall have to go to the union." I sought to comfort her; I reminded her how God had cared for her in the past, and how He had promised never to leave her nor forsake her; and that as surely as she was a child of God, so surely would He care for her; and that even some of His own children would be led to assist her.

But still the temptation continued, and what was the end of it? Her joy was marred completely for years; she was in deep trouble, simply by this one thought. Yet see how it came to pass at last. One by one the sovereigns were used, and at length it came to the last sovereign; one shilling of it was spent, when the Lord took her to Himself, and there was for her no such thing as the workhouse.

But see how she was losing her spiritual joy, and how her life and her communion with God were marred by this one fiery dart; whereas, if the shield of faith had been used, the devil would have been confounded and her last days would have been in peace. Therefore, let us use this shield of faith, with the revelation God has been pleased to make of Himself, and we shall soon see the fiery darts of the devil quenched, and have joy.

"AND TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION"

In the parallel passage in I Thessalonians v. 8 it "for an helmet, the hope of salvation." So we have to understand it here, it is the hope of our salvation that is to be our helmet.

All these parts of the armour were of great importance to the Roman soldier; the girdle to bind the breastplate to defend the vital parts, the boots to protect the feet, and enable them to march firmly, the shield to ward off blows; but although he had all these, there was yet wanting one thing - the iron helmet. Without it, how soon would his head, the most exposed and most tender part of his body, have been

injured or hurt. Therefore, the Roman soldier was also protected in this part; his head was protected by the iron helmet.

Thus with the child of God; he has protection for his spiritually weak parts, and it is just this - the hope of salvation. While on earth, we go toiling amidst difficulties, and trials, and temptations. Often all things seem to be against us, and not only the world, but sometimes even the children of God turn their backs on us, and we are left alone, comparatively speaking. Yet, in the midst of it all, there is something unspeakably comforting in this, that makes the heart joyous. What is it? It is "the hope of salvation," the joy of looking forward, and knowing that we shall be in heaven at last.

It is this that keeps us up. The way at times may be very dark, but then it is always a pilgrimage, which is day by day getting shorter as I get nearer home. The journey is ever towards home - nearer, nearer home. It is this bright, blessed prospect of home, home, home - of complete deliverance from sin and temptation, through the blood of Christ Jesus, which strengtheneth us at such times.

To know that we shall be delivered from the old evil nature, to be brought into a state in which the will of God is carried out by us continually, that the mind of God shall be found in us, and that we shall be with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now at the right hand of God, and shall be like Him - these are some of the bright, blessed prospects of the state to which we are going.

Therefore, my beloved brethren and sisters, especially the younger ones, when temptation, trial, or difficulty come, and when all seems going against us here, remember that this is not our home, and that we must not expect to enjoy this present evil world. Then think of the Father's house where there are many mansions, and the bright, blessed, and glorious prospect we have of that Father's home, and you will find there is not a better lever to lift us above this world than just to contemplate heaven. Oh, make much of it! make much of it!

For fifty years I have known the Lord, and as grey hairs multiply, and as, little by little, I get nearer and nearer, the prospect becomes brighter and brighter; and during many years of sore conflict, trial, and affliction, this has cheered me exceedingly: "I shall soon be home - soon be with my Lord." Therefore, make much of this hope, that, even as the helmet protected the Roman soldier, so the hope of salvation may protect you by the way.

Now the last part of the armour:

"AND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD"

All the other parts to which we have referred, were in order to protect us from assaults; that is, of a defensive character. Now, here is something to make an attack with - a weapon of an offensive character, with which to march against the enemy, and to make inroads on the powers of darkness.

Not only as the children of God are we to know our weakness, we are also to know and to act as those who have God on our side, One who is both able and willing to help us in time of need; and we should go right among the enemies, that we may pluck brands out of the fire, to the praise, and honour, and glory of God.

Beloved fellow Christians, it is the will of the Lord, that we should not only defend ourselves, but that we should, also resolutely seek to win souls and rescue poor sinners from the snares of the devil, and bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ. For both of these ends there is nothing like the weapon used by our Saviour Himself when tempted, "It is written"; that is, the use of the word of God.

And in order that we may be able to use it to good purpose, we must study it, as I observed last week, regularly and prayerfully, with meditation, and with simple faith, and with self-application. Do not let us reason, but learn ever to take God at His word with child-like simplicity; and when occasion arises bring it out against the devil. Then he will not be able to stand.

This word, the word of God is also to be used that we may win souls for Christ; and not only with reference to them, but with reference to our fellow-disciples, that we may strengthen their hands, and encourage their hearts against the powers of darkness. We can never make too much of the word of God, which must be in our hands as a sharp sword, "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." It is the spiritual sword for the spiritual conflict.

"PRAYING AND WATCHING"

Lastly "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel."

It is not necessary to dwell on this last part, as I have spoken on it again and again. Only this will I observe, that while all the other points which have been referred to are deeply important, yet they will not be successful unless they are coupled with prayer, constant and believing prayer; for if we should attend to all the other things, and put on the whole armour which God has provided for us, and yet not pray, we shall find how weak and helpless we are.

Why is this? Though we are the children of God we are in ourselves weak, and God will have us to recognise our helplessness in regard to Himself. Therefore, as opportunity and time allow, let us give ourselves to prayer. It is most important to have stated times for prayer, and not to leave it to certain impressions. If we leave it to feelings, you will find that you will be less and less inclined to prayer, and soon will be altogether without it; or, in other words, a poor miserable sinner, without help in the conflict. Have certain times for secret closet prayer, when by ourselves we pour out our souls before God.

In connection with this, let us, as heads of families, have regular family prayer, so that God shall be recognised in the family. As children of God we should also seek to meet with other children of God in prayer, such as prayer meetings. We ought to seek more and more opportunities of fellowship in prayer, as, for instance, in the daily prayer meeting in connection with this hall, where we have met day by day to spread out our wants, before Him, and to seek His blessing on our united efforts for the Lord.

Now, my dear fellow believers, attend to these matters which we have been considering, putting on the whole armour of God, accompanied by prayer, and certain I am that you will be happy Christians, holy Christians, and useful Christians. That is what I would desire with regard to all my beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, that they all should be happy Christians; and that they cannot be, except they seek to act according to the mind of God. But acting thus, they will be holy children, and if they walk in His ways and walk with Him, they will also be useful children, as they will be living witnesses for God.

Not only so, but let them aim after being fruitful, bearing fruit thirty, forty, or fifty-fold, and, it may be, sixty-fold. Having attained to this, be not satisfied, but aim after sixty-five, or seventy-fold, and then it might be, and there is no reason that it should not be, a hundred-fold.

May God help us so to live as to bring praise, honour, and glory to His name while life is continued to us.

I wish, my beloved Christian friends, to direct your attention to two passages in connection with prayer. The first you will find in the commencement of Psalm cxvi., "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplication. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live,"

MARKING ANSWERS TO PRAYER

The Psalmist states, that he loves Jehovah, because He hath heard his voice and his supplications. Now this cannot be the case with us, except we mark the hand of God, and except we observe that He hath heard our supplications, and that He hath answered our prayers. The Psalmist had marked the hand of God, and he says, "I love Jehovah, because He hath heard my voice."

Very few of God's dear children are aware how much of this marking of the hand of God, with regard to answers to prayer, has to do with increased love to their heavenly Father. We are so apt to leave unnoticed the hand of God, and to pass over what God has been pleased to do in answer to our prayer.

I would particularly advise all, but especially the younger believers, to use a little book, in which they may note down on the one side the requests which they bring before God. There are certain matters which God has laid on our hearts, and we should note them down. It would be helpful to us to write, At such-and-such a time I began, to pray for such-and-such a thing; and then to continue to pray with regard to this matter. If we do so, we shall find that sooner or later the prayer will be answered; and then let us mark on the opposite side, that it has, at such a time, pleased God to answer that prayer.

REVIEWING ANSWERED PRAYERS

After some time, read over the memorandum book, and you will find how again and again it has pleased God to answer your prayers; and perhaps regarding matters about which you little expected the answer to come; and soon you will find the wondrous effect of this on your heart, in increasing your love and gratitude to our heavenly Father. The more careful you are in marking what you ask, and what God has given, the more distinctly you will be able to trace how again and again it pleased God to answer your prayers, and more, you will be drawn out to God in love and gratitude. You will find precisely as the Psalmist found it when he says, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications."

THE EFFECTS OF THUS REVIEWING ANSWERED PRAYERS

We ought to love God, even though we have not answers to our prayers; but all this will greatly increase our love; and it is not only once, but if we mark the hand of God, we shall soon find that we have scores and hundreds of answers to prayer. And thus we shall be led to love Him more and more for all He has done. And as we mark how we have been helped, and how gracious and bountiful our Father has been,

and how He takes pleasure in listening to the supplications of His children, the heart will be filled increasingly with love and gratitude to Him.

Another effect of all this on the Psalmist we find in the second verse. "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live." The more evidence we have of His power, and of His willingness to help us, the more our hearts should be determined to call upon the Lord. The more our prayers have been answered, the more should we be stirred up with new determination to ask yet greater things. We should be encouraged to come again and again, in order that He may incline His ear unto us.

Is this, my beloved friends, the case with us? Are those two points found in us, and can we say with the Psalmist, "I love Jehovah, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications?" And do our hearts say, "Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live?" Verily it should be so with us, if we are believers.

FREEDOM FROM ANXIETY

The second passage to which I desire to direct your attention you will find in the epistle to the Philippians, the fourth chapter, and in the sixth and seventh verses, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"Be careful for nothing." This by no means signifies that we may be careless, thoughtless, or unconcerned about everything. That is not the meaning of it. The meaning is, not to be anxious about anything. This is one of the privileges of the children of God, that they are permitted and not only permitted but invited, and not only invited, but commanded, to bring all their cares, sorrows, trials, and wants to their heavenly Father. To roll all their burdens upon God; to cast all their cares upon Him.

And because they are permitted, yea, commanded so to do, they have no need to be anxious about anything. However many or varied our difficulties or necessities, we should commit them all in believing prayer to God; but we should not be anxious. And why not? Because it is impossible to be anxious without dishonouring God.

If the men of the world see that we Christians are anxious like themselves, they will have ground for saying, that our profession of having an Almighty Friend and Helper in heaven is only a profession; and, therefore, we dishonour God by not trusting in Him in the hour of need.

WE HAVE, HOWEVER, SUCH A FRIEND

And He is willing and able to help us and to deliver us in His own time and way. This is the very reason we need not be anxious about anything.

But you say, how Can I, a wife with a husband given to drinking, not be anxious? No, I say, my sister in Christ, you are to pray for your husband; you are to pray for that husband very earnestly. But remember to look out for an answer to your prayer; and it is the will of our heavenly Father that you are not to be anxious even in such circumstances. You are earnestly seeking that he should be converted, that is

right and proper; but still, be not anxious even in such circumstances. If you roll the burden upon God, and cast all your care upon Him, you will be free from anxiety even regarding this.

And thus with every matter; regarding our children, for instance, who are unconverted, we have to be careful to train them in the fear of God, to set a holy, Godly example before them, to pray much for them, and, at suitable times, to bring the truth before them; but even regarding them we are not to be anxious. We are to roll the burden – the whole burden - upon God, and He will carry the burden for us.

So – literally - this is to be taken, Be anxious about nothing. And thus we shall walk in holy confidence. Trust in your heavenly Father, looking to Him, confiding in Him, knowing that He will help in His own time and way.

But, while the commandment is not to be anxious about anything, at the same time, we are exhorted to bring everything before God. It is not to make us careless, but to teach us to

LEAN UPON HIM ALONE

We are here exhorted to bring the matter before God. "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Notice especially the word "everything." It is not simply great matters we are to bring before God, not simply small things, but "everything." Therefore, all our affairs - temporal or spiritual - let us bring them before God. And this for the simple reason, that life is made up of little things. If we attempt to stand in our own strength under little trials, we shall find them too heavy for us, and we shall fall, which is dishonouring to God.

THE FOLLY OF NEGLECTING THIS INJUNCTION

Let me see a Christian man who attempts to carry the little burdens in his own strength, and I know that he will soon dishonour God. For we have not a particle of strength to carry any burdens, little or great; and, therefore, we must bring them all to God. And if we attempt to carry them, we shall find that they will increase in weight.

To speak after the manner of men, God puts a pound weight of trial upon us, and if we take it up and lay it on the shoulders of our heavenly Father, it is gone; but if, on the other hand, we attempt to carry it ourselves, what is the result? Soon it will increase to ten pounds, and if we still try to carry it, it will increase to a hundredweight, and if we try still to stagger under it in our own strength, it will increase still more, in order to lead us to cast it upon God.

Now our wisdom is just this, when we have any little burdens, let us tell our heavenly Father, "I have no strength for this weight, I cannot carry the burden." Well, our heavenly Father is ready to do this for us; He has commanded us to roll all our cares on Him, and not to attempt to carry them in our own strength. Let us then cast all our cares and burdens upon God, and He will carry them for us.

"SUPPLICATION"

Therefore it is so deeply important "in everything, by prayer and supplication, to let your requests be made known to God." With prayer; and not only with prayer, but with supplication; that is, with

earnestness and with entreaty, just as the beggars sometimes act. They ask for alms; well, you seem not to listen and pass on, but they go after you; perhaps twenty steps, and sometimes even a hundred yards or more. They follow you, still asking, until they obtain the alms they desire.

Now this is what we have to do; not simply to mention our request before God, but to go on asking again and again, with earnest prayer and supplication, until we receive. Just ask as a beggar would do; and will not our heavenly Father give it to us, seeing that He hath bestowed His greatest gift, even His Son upon us?

“THANKSGIVING”

Again, we have specially to notice that prayer and supplication is coupled with thanksgiving. That is, if I may say so, that we should lay the foundation in the way of thanksgiving, and upon that, place the superstructure of prayer and supplication. We should praise the Lord for what He has given us already; while asking Him for more blessing.

We are frequently very remiss in this; we forget to render praise for the mercies already received from our heavenly Father. This should not be so.

THE CERTAIN EFFECT OF ALL THIS

In the next verse we have the precious result of all this, "The peace of God," what a precious result of such a way of acting is this; our hearts are at peace, instead of hurrying hither and thither, as men beside themselves, and instead of great excitement. Instead of all this, the result of prayer and praise will be, our hearts will be at peace.

We shall have the peace which passeth all understanding. And that peaceful calm which is so precious, and which no words can describe, and which is called "the peace of God" shall be in our hearts. "The peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"KEEP YOUR HEARTS"

The idea of a garrison, is in that word "keep." And the meaning is that our hearts shall be kept by the peace of God, as by an occupying garrison.

There is much in these verses; and whilst the men of this world, and even some children of God who know not these truths, and do not ask thus, are wretched, and anxious, and hurrying about like people beside themselves, when trouble or excitement come; we, the children of God, who know these precious truths, are able calmly to wait on the Lord, and to leave ourselves quietly in the hands of God. Thus the peace which passeth understanding will rule in our hearts and minds, and we shall not merely find help, but we shall be kept from false ways, and bring honour to God before the world. And shall thus comfort greatly the children of God, to the praise and honour and glory of His name.

As the Lord may help us, we will meditate this afternoon on a few verses in the third chapter of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, from the 22nd verse: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." (Read on to the close of verse 26.)

On these verses we will meditate this afternoon. I never undertake, according to my own judgment, to choose a subject for meditation. When I have the prospect of preaching, I wait on God, and ask Him to direct me to a subject. So I have asked Him repeatedly for a portion for this afternoon, and this is the portion to which I felt directed. And now, may the Lord grant us a blessing!

We have particularly, in the first place, to consider the circumstances under which Jeremiah wrote these words, "It is of the Lord's (Jehovah's) mercies we are not consumed." We have to consider the state in which, as a nation the Israelites then were.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Almost all the Jews had fallen victims either to the war, or to famine, or to pestilence, or had been carried away as captives to Babylon. Only the poorest persons were left in the land, and even these were in very small numbers. In order that the whole land might not be desolate, the king of Babylon gave orders that a few men should be left behind.

Further, Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. The walls had been broken down round about the city, and the Temple was burned. Under these circumstances the prophet says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." He meant to say, if we had what we deserve, we should be utterly destroyed: Not a single man would be left alive; not a single house in the country but it would be destroyed. And if any should be left they deserve no longer to be taken up by Jehovah. That is what we deserve on account of our sins. The prophet finds that all this has come upon them in consequence of their sin.

Now, in order to make this practical to ourselves, let us ask; If we had what we deserve, what would it be? We could expect nothing but entire destruction. If we were treated in the way of justice and judgment, and not according to mercy and grace, what could there be but destruction for us?

I ask you to put the question each one to himself with regard to this: Have I been convinced that I am a sinner - and such a sinner as to deserve punishment nothing but punishment? If you have never been convinced of this - that you are a sinner and that, as a sinner, you deserve nothing but punishment, then I ask you affectionately to consider it now; and to consider the only ground of salvation, and whether you have yet seen that your punishment has been laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you are thus a sinner, and deserving of punishment (whether you see it or not, it is a fact, revealed by the Holy Ghost), then consider that God, in mercy, that you might not be punished, has sent Christ, His only-begotten Son, to bear the punishment in our room and stead, as our Substitute.

God, in the riches of His grace did that, in order that we might escape the punishment and destruction due to us, which punishment must have been visited on us, unless He had done this. Therefore was the Lord Jesus visited with stripes, and it was that which nailed Him to the accursed tree, in order that He might bear the punishment, and that we might be saved, eternally saved; that we might be happy, eternally happy.

Now do we all see this? And if not, I ask you, prayer fully to read the first three chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. There it is plainly stated, what we are by nature and what we merit. And if you do see this truth, then I especially ask you to entreat God to help you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ: for thus, and thus alone, you can escape the punishment. If you trust in Him, you shall not be punished; for

through Him do we obtain mercy, even "the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace;" and if we believe, we become the children of God; "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," Through believing the gospel, we are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." And thus there is before us the bright and blessed prospect of eternal joy and happiness, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

SELF-ABASEMENT

Notice particularly also here, that the prophet does not say, it is of the Lord's mercies that these wicked Jews are not consumed, but "that we are not consumed." In this he includes himself. This is particularly to be noticed, for Jeremiah was one of the holiest men then living; and yet he includes himself when he says, it is of Jehovah's mercies that we are not consumed-that I among them am not consumed.

So it is with those that fear God, and are believers in the Messiah; whether believing in the Messiah which was to come, as in Jeremiah's days, or as now, in looking back to the Messiah as having come. The more they knew of God, the more they see their own corrupt nature, their own sinfulness and shortcomings. And, instead of having a proud, haughty spirit towards fellow sinners we include ourselves with them, and say, with the prophet, "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed."

The heart of God was still towards the descendants of Abraham; the compassionate heart of Jehovah was still towards the literal seed of Abraham, and the blessings which had been promised to that seed were not forgotten; so that the prophet could say, "new every morning."

This is the language of all who really know God, of all who are acquainted with God, and who have watched His hand in any small degree. Daily do they say that the compassions of Jehovah are indeed new every morning, and that great is His faithfulness. And if it were not thus, what would become of us who have known the Lord Jesus Christ? We should soon fall back, if left to ourselves. We should soon fall into that corrupt state from which we were delivered, if left to ourselves. It is by God's grace that we are what we are; just because He is faithful to us. Although we should be unfaithful for a time, yet He abides faithful to His people. How blessed is it to know this!

Again, "Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him." This comforted the prophet in the midst of the sorrows which surrounded him. The people were almost all slain by the sword, or had perished by famine or pestilence; and the few who were "left were for the most part carried away captive. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Temple burned.

Very few of us can enter into the full sorrow of the prophet under these circumstances; but this is certain, that it was an immense trial to him, especially the last circumstance, that the Temple was destroyed. Yet mark, he is not overwhelmed; there is yet hope. Hope in what? Hope in the living God: "Jehovah is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him." The living God remains to me. Though the people are destroyed, though Jerusalem is destroyed, and the walls thereof broken down, and though the Temple is burned, yet God is my portion. That is the special point of our meditation –

"JEHOVAH IS MY PORTION"

God was all to him, and that is particularly my message to all my fellow disciples this afternoon. How is it with us regarding this? Is the living God our portion? Do we find Him to be our all? Is the living God

our portion and our hope? Remember, whatever else we have, He must be our portion. Suppose for a moment that all our friends turned their backs on us, yet if God Himself be ours, how rich are we? If we were possessed of much wealth and property, and were to lose it all, yet with God Himself as our portion, we should be rich. And if we were to spend the remainder of our lives in a dungeon, yet if God remains with us and goes with us there, we can be unspeakably happy. What are all these things if we have God? Have we, my dear friends, Him for our portion? I do not ask you now, are you religious people? I suppose you are, because you are here today. I do not ask if you read the Bible; I suppose that you do. I do not ask if you go to a place of worship; I suppose that. I do not ask if you now and then pray; I suppose you do. I do not ask if you give a little money to the cause of God; I suppose that. But, I ask more than all this, far, far more than all this, Do you find in God Himself your all? I ask you nothing short of this, that you ask yourself now, as before God: Is my wife my portion? Is my husband my portion? If so, then a poor portion you have. It is right to have natural affection towards your wife or your husband. It is right and proper for parents to love their children, and for children to love their parents; otherwise it would be sinful in the highest degree. But, none of these relatives are to be our portion as the children of God; Jehovah Himself must be that. He would have us satisfied with nothing short of Himself. I ask you whether this is the case with you? With some, the treasures of this world are their portion - what a poor miserable portion! You will find such are unhappy, and have guilty consciences. You will never be satisfied by the treasures of this world - never.

“JEHOVAH IS MY PORTION.”

But others make their business their portion. They are very earnest in attending to their business. Quite right in its place this. I do not wish at all to encourage idleness in any way in reference to this; for Christians should attend carefully and attentively to their business; if they do not, they will not have God's blessing on their business. But yet, if the business is our portion, if money-making, or rank, or standing in life, or anything in this world be our portion, or what we seek to find satisfaction in, then I say it is a poor, miserable portion, by whatever name it may be called. But if, on the contrary, we have God for our portion, if in Him we seek to find satisfaction, and in nothing else, then have we a rich portion indeed. Is He only our joy, our hope, our happiness? Are our hearts in Him? our hopes in Him? our everything in Him? Have we all this? Let us be honest before God. Let us be honest with ourselves. Have we one thing we care about, and is that God Himself? Or, have we two things, or ten things that we care about? There is one thing only that should be uppermost in our hearts; and that is God Himself; one thing that should be our portion, and that is God Himself. The prophet Jeremiah had this portion, and therefore could never be miserable, poor, or forsaken. All is right so long as the living God Himself is our portion. As was the case with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when on this earth, He had only one object, and that was, to live for, and serve God, His Father, to do His work. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me." And so it should be with us, that everything we do should be done for the praise, and honour, and glory of God. This should be our ruling motive. All our thoughts should be occupied with God, either directly or indirectly; even our coming together to meet our friends should be with reference to God - even our eating and drinking should be with reference to Him. Do we seek strength to live and labour for God, and do we spend the strength for Him, which we may have obtained?

Let us then ask ourselves the question,

"IS GOD HIMSELF MY PORTION?"

I do not ask you, without asking myself the question, What is my portion, my happiness, my *all*? Is it God Himself, or the things of this world? I answer for myself, I could not be satisfied with anything short of this, that God, and God alone, should be my portion day by day, and week by week, and month by month, and year by year. Oh, beloved friends, stop short of nothing till you come to this, that God Himself is your only portion. The consequence of having Him for your portion will be that whatever be the circumstance in which you are placed: whether there be war, or famine, or pestilence, or whatever be the circumstances connected with your present life; still you can be happy in the midst of them all. Let it be sickness, or danger, or even the prospect of death itself, God is yours, and you will yet be happy; but if God Himself be not your portion, you are dependent on, and affected by circumstances, and you will be more or less miserable in accordance with the things which surround you. But if you can say, "Jehovah is my portion," you can look forward to brighter and happier days. Jeremiah had this hope, and he looked forward expecting that the people would be brought back again, that Jerusalem would be built again, and that the Temple would be restored. And so it was, after about seventy years. Because the promises were from the living God Himself to the descendants of Abraham, therefore he could say, "The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him."

But people will say, this was very well in the days of the prophets and the apostles, but now, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, we cannot expect such things. I believe no such thing. Why should not the people of God be as happy in their God, as ever the prophets or apostles were? Why not? Is not He the same God? Is His power not the same? Is His love to His children not as great as ever it was? Is His willingness to help His children not as great as ever it was? Certainly it is. The blessed Book remains with us; the precious promises are still there; and therefore we ought to remember, that to trust completely in the Lord, and to be happy in Him, is yet as possible as it was to the children of God in the middle of the first, or the beginning of the second century. Why not? There is nothing at all to hinder. You and I are certainly not apostles or prophets, but the blessing of peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and of the blessed promises, we may enjoy now in the nineteenth century as much as these believers of old; and, together with the prophet, we may say, "Jehovah is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him."

Again, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him." What an especial encouragement, this is with regard to the trials and difficulties of life. All of us have sooner later to pass through difficulties and trials, our path is not always smooth. Yet in these circumstances, let us lay hold on such a word as this, "Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him." To all that wait for Him, He is very good. Let us go and make known our requests to Him, and seek His help, and wait till it comes. For the promise is, "Jehovah is good unto them that wait for Him." There is something to be had by waiting on the Lord. He is good to them that seek Him. This is especial encouragement to any who are not yet believers in Him. Here is the promise: "The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him." What they have to do is, just to ask God to have mercy upon them. And they will find that He is good to the soul that seeketh Him. To any inquiring about the things of God, I would say, the soul that seeks Him will have blessing.

And especially is this comforting to us, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever our trials, perplexities, and difficulties, there is the promise, "The Lord is good to them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him." There is no such thing as seeking God in vain; the seeking soul shall find. He

will not seek blessing, comfort, instruction, power over natural evil tendencies from the Lord in vain. Whether we seek power over our temper, or pride, or high-mindedness, or wilfulness, or whatever may be in us, contrary to the mind of God, let us just bring the case with childlike simplicity before the Lord, and we shall find that it is not in vain to seek the Lord, but that "He is good to them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him."

Now we come to the last verse upon which we will meditate at present. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."

HOPING AND WAITING

In the first place, "It is good that a man should hope for the salvation of Jehovah." Regarding the word salvation here, it is to be understood as it is generally used in the Old Testament, not merely deliverance from sin and punishment, as it is generally used in the New Testament, but in the wider sense of the word deliverance generally. Thus it does not here mean only deliverance for the soul - though that is not excluded - but it means deliverance generally from trial, temptation, sorrow and difficulty. For this salvation or deliverance, it is good for us to hope in the Lord. All of us at times find ourselves under circumstances from which we need deliverance; then it is good to hope for salvation from Jehovah. Are we doing so? It is the will of the Lord regarding us. It is here stated that it is good to do so and you will find it to be good - practically and experimentally you will find it to be good in your own soul. The devil's aim, when trial and affliction come, is to whisper to your heart - "Ah this may last for ever!" "I shall never get out of this." You are looking forward anticipating a life-long burden. Listen to Jesus, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Leave everything in the hands of God. Aim at being in such a position, that you can look to Him and seek from Him grace for the present day; and He will give it. As for tomorrow, if it comes, the Lord will give grace for it also.

Remember, when the thought comes into your mind, "I shall never get rid of this;" that it is good for a man, to hope for the salvation of Jehovah; He will deliver. Trial and affliction will come; well, never mind, deliverance will also come, for the Lord is good. If you do not hold fast this hope, if you lose it, and give up the comfort that God would bestow upon your soul, then you will find yourself losing the comfort and strength you would otherwise have. Therefore I say, hold it fast.

Remember the memorable passage in Psalm xxvii. 13, where David says, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. All my strength would be completely taken away, except I were expecting to see better days. That is what we have to do to be looking out for brighter and happier days: more blessed and cheerful days, which the Lord will send if we wait for Him. That is the thought which comes from the Spirit of God; the other thought, that of hopelessness, comes from the evil one, in order that, if possible, he may make us wretched, and that we should give up hoping in God, and should sit down in despair, as if no good were possible. But "it is good that a man should hope for the salvation of Jehovah." And this is not all; it is said, moreover, it is good that he should quietly wait for the salvation of Jehovah. Thus, we have not only to hope, but we have to wait, and wait quietly. This you and I cannot naturally do. We want to have our deliverance at once; we would have it today; and do not want to wait, or that it should be delayed. And if it does not come when we want it, the temptation is to think ourselves wiser "than God, to begin to complain, to be dissatisfied, and even to begin to murmur, because it is so. Now, all this is dishonouring to God, and should not be. The will of God is, that we should make known our requests to Him; in the meantime leave ourselves in His hand. And, for our comfort, remember the words, "All things work together for good to them

that love God.” This should sustain us in the meantime, together with the hope that He will finally deliver us. And if this deliverance is not yet, then our business is, quietly to wait, and by quietly waiting, to honour God; because then it will be known to those who see us, that we have a Father in heaven, a Father who cares for us; and that we are watched over and cared for; and that we trust and rely upon the Father in the assurance that "all things work together for good for them that love God.” Let us seek to carry away a blessing.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

First of all, then, let us remember that, whatever trials or afflictions befall us, it is nothing at all to what we deserve. We all deserve eternal punishment, even hell. Therefore let us say with the prophet, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning.”

The next point is, that Jehovah Himself is our portion and our hope. Let us be satisfied with nothing short of this, that God Himself is our all.

The third point which I desire you specially to carry away is, that when trials and afflictions come, as come they will, we remember that "it is good to hope and to wait for the salvation of Jehovah;" and not only that we begin to wait, but that we go on quietly waiting till the deliverance comes. And then it becomes us to bless" and praise God for what He has done.



Müllers is a working name of the
The George Müller Charitable Trust is a limited company registered in England and Wales
Registered Charity no 1066832 Company no 3471812
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